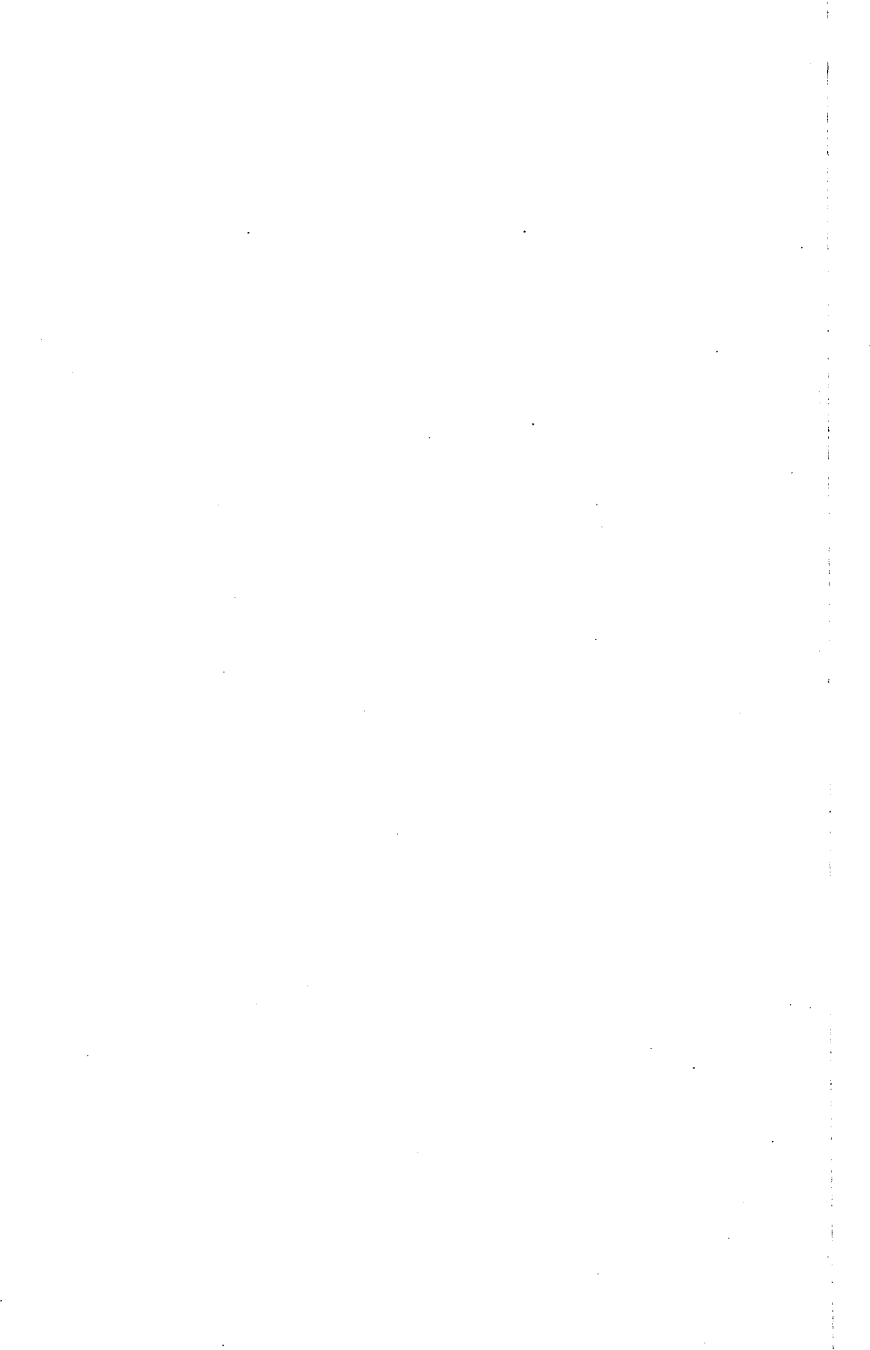


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THE USE OF THE BIBLE IN PREACHING

A PLEA FOR MODERN BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE
IN THE PULPIT

BY

CARL S. PATTON

*Professor of Homiletics, Pacific School of Religion
Berkeley, California*



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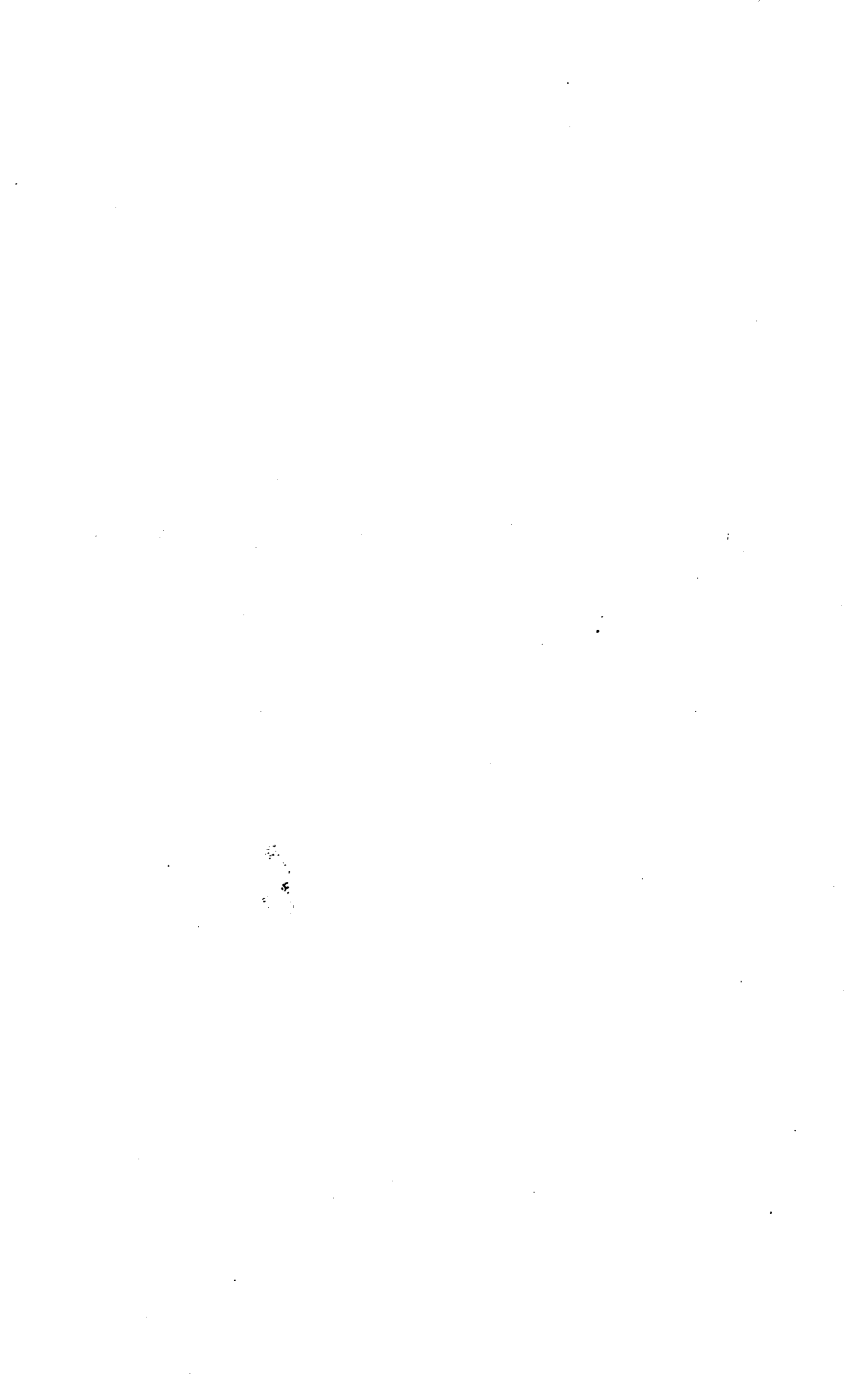
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To
MR. JAMES FOSTER
WHO KNOWS GOOD PREACHING
AND LIKES TO ENCOURAGE IT



PREFACE

THIS volume is the result of the author's having taught, in two theological schools, a course on "The Use of the Bible in Preaching"; and, of course, of the many years of preaching which preceded even them. When it was first suggested that I publish some of the material thus used, I demurred, fearing that the book, if it were read by preachers (and it would scarcely be read by anyone else), might be used as a "crib." Nothing is deadlier to good preaching than books which invite the preacher to borrow his homiletical material ready made. To produce a book which can at all be misused to that end may seem a dangerous proceeding.

Nevertheless, the experience of the author in the classroom with much of the material contained in this volume, reinforces his opinion, long held, that modern scholarship has made possible a use of the Bible in the pulpit that is in many ways more rewarding, and especially more educative, than any pulpit use of it that has been made, or was possible, in the past. Many preachers "accept" the results of modern biblical scholarship, without being personally very familiar with them. The kind of biblical preaching advocated and illustrated in this volume requires not merely acceptance but familiarity. However, the biblical learning required of the preacher to do the kind of pulpit work here advocated does not demand that he shall have been a lifelong student of and

a specialist in the higher criticism of the Old and New Testaments. If he has a few commentaries of the right sort and a good modern biblical dictionary, he can find in them the critical and historical material necessary for his work. He will do this work with more facility and assurance if the modern point of view is not novel to him. But if he knows enough about it in general to see that the historical study of the Bible has made a new book of it for the preacher, a few good tools are all he needs in preparation for the treatment of any particular passage. The kind of preaching here suggested cannot be done by preachers who are ignorant of the Bible; but it can be done by preachers who learn as they go along.

C. S. P.

BERKELEY, CALIF., July, 1936

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THE USE OF THE BIBLE IN PREACHING

THE BIBLE A NEW BOOK FOR THE PREACHER

IT IS time for a renaissance of biblical preaching. The reasons for this are many and obvious.

In the first place, the Bible is little read today. It is no longer read in the home. It is not taught in schools. Such reading of it as is done from the pulpit is not systematic enough to convey any real conception of its content. People are unfamiliar with it. They do not know what is in it. It is still, to most persons, a proper book to have around, but people know little or nothing of it. Time was when an average Christian congregation could catch any ordinary biblical allusion or reference made by the preacher. But not now. Let a preacher try to refer familiarly to the careers of Joash and Jehoiadah, as William Stoughton did in his sermon before the governor of Massachusetts in 1668, and observe the look of bewilderment that passes over his congregation's faces as he does so. We revere the Bible, we defend it, we brag that it is still the best seller. But we do not read it.

I suppose we may still assume that the Bible is worth knowing something about. I recall the remark of H. G. Wells, in his *Outline of History*, to the effect that the Old and New Testaments constitute "the most remarkable collection of ancient documents in existence." The Bible is in fact the only ancient book in everybody's library. Modern life suffers everywhere from a too unmitigated devotion to

"the cult of the contemporaneous." In fiction, poetry, biography, the aim of most people nowadays is to read not the best but the latest. In religion or elsewhere, there is nothing thinner, more brittle and less nourishing, than a modernity cut off from a knowledge and appreciation of the past. The history of religion is a vast affair. No minister, no congregation, can be acquainted with all of it. But a very considerable part of that history, and for Christian people the most important part of it, is mirrored in the Bible. This Bible the minister is supposed to know, and something at least of what is in it he is supposed to impart to his congregation.

The most of such imparting the minister must make on Sunday morning and from the pulpit, because it is only on Sunday mornings and in his sermons that he gets a chance at any large proportion of his people. A few of them he can gather now and then into a Bible class, if he has time to teach one. But only a few people, and never the ones that need it most, profit by this instruction. Some portions of the Bible require such detail in treatment, or are so little adapted to pulpit use, that it is only in such a class they can be well taught. But such portions of the Bible as the minister cannot get before his people on Sunday mornings and by way of his sermons the most of them will have to remain ignorant of. Sunday morning alone offers the time, the place and the people.

Now it is rather a strange, but at the same time a fortunate thing, that just at this time when the people know the least about the Bible and have the least interest in it, there has accumulated a vast amount of new biblical knowledge capable of making a new book out of an old one. This new knowl-

edge is at the disposal of the preacher and waits to be imparted to the people. But though it has been accumulating for several generations and has become the commonplace of all progressive theological schools, it certainly has not thus far been communicated to the people. I recall a rather despairing remark of one of the great Old Testament scholars and teachers of the last generation to the effect that his work seemed to him largely fruitless; as he went about among the churches, he said, nobody seemed to have heard of any of the things he had been so laboriously teaching for so many years.

This is not the place to show in detail just how and to what extent the modern, critical, historical approach to the Bible makes a new book out of an old one. But it certainly does. It makes the Bible not merely a new book, but a new kind of book. It has ceased to be an authority and has become a source book. In the decline of popular knowledge of the Bible, the Old Testament has doubtless suffered more than the New. But as a source book of religion, the Old Testament is incomparable. Here is the history of religion, not written as it would be by a modern professional historian of religion, but embedded in ancient laws, customs and social usages. It is told in the varied forms of myth, legend, folklore, history, poetry, prophecy and apocalypse. Here, not in the form of a dry-as-dust chronicle, nor wholly on the surface, but here, unmistakably, to be found by those who know how to look for it, is the fascinating story of the development of religion among that ancient people who had the greatest genius for it, over that period that is most significant for its development; from the time of a naïve polydaemonism down through the stage of henotheism or monolatry to the

ethical theism of the Hebrew prophets upon whom Jesus made no attempt to improve.

There was very general dissent, some years ago, from the utterance of one of our prominent men, now become an LL.D., to the effect that "history is bunk." Some kinds of history may almost if not quite deserve that short and nasty characterization. What we may call merely external history — the names of battles, the dates of the coronation or the death of kings, many of whom might well have died without being crowned; and a kind of gossipy history consisting of the intrigues of courts, the rise and fall of personal favorites, the beauties and the sorrows of queens and such other high-class kitchen or back-fence talk — may be more or less bunk. But there is one kind of history that has no bunk whatever about it and is more important than any and all others. It is the history that shows the road over which men have traveled in their moral and spiritual life. How men have thought and felt about human life and the forces that influence or control it; what they have believed about gods and the human soul and the relation between the two; what ideals they have cherished, what things have been right and what things wrong for them from one time to another; and how they have slowly and painfully, but still gloriously, passed from the period of their infancy to that of their maturity in such matters — this is certainly one of the most significant chapters in all human history. And of this whole story, the most significant single chapter is the Old Testament. The modern knowledge of the Bible is the tool by which the preacher can give to his people, not indeed a complete and detailed knowledge of, but certainly some genuine insight into, the remarkable story of this spiritual history of the human race.

This has to be done, for reasons already presented, in sermons. But if there were some other way to do it I think the best way would still be in sermons. The pulpit is no place for lectures, even about the Bible. Lectures about the Bible are not much good anyhow. They are not very interesting. People do not like to be lectured to, except by some celebrity, preferably from abroad, and when they have paid an admission fee. Under such circumstances they seem to be willing to be uncomfortable, upon occasion. But not on Sundays. Good preaching, however, always interests people. It seems to have something to do with them. Now if what a preacher knows and has to say about the Bible, instead of being concentrated now and then into a lecture on the Bible, is made to permeate his sermons so that it is an unmistakable though almost unperceived ingredient of them, his biblical point of view comes home to his people as a perfectly simple and natural thing which there is no reason to question. As it is incidental to his sermons, accessory to the moral and spiritual truth he is trying to drive home, a constituent part of them, used not for its own sake but for the sake of the truth which it liberates and enforces, people are the more disposed to listen, both because they are interested in the truth and because they are not conscious of being specifically instructed. So I say, the best way to communicate whatever the preacher knows and wishes to say about the Bible, is in his sermons.

I do not maintain that all preaching should be biblical. Far from it. Religion is in the making, all the time. Current happenings in political, economic and international life call aloud for comment and for Christian interpretation by the Christian prophet. Contemporary scientific and philo-

sophical thought moves constantly on, with new bearings upon religious beliefs and practices. It is idle to pretend that the only things we need to talk about in the pulpit are to be found in the Bible. It is a waste of time to try to find a biblical text for every sermon. Whenever a man has any word from God, no matter where he got it, let him speak it. It will carry the authority of its own truth and of the speaker's own conviction; and it is futile to try to give it any other authority. I understand also the contention that preaching today should be "life-centered," not "Bible-centered." Certainly. But people in Bible times were alive also, and except for their clothes and their methods of transportation and the number of bathtubs in their houses many of them were more modern than many folks who are alive now. Let there be no dressing up in biblical clothes of sermons that do not need any such. God is contemporaneous. Nor will purely biblical sermons, that grow naturally out of the Bible and that cannot be divorced from it, do for a steady diet. There isn't anything that can be preached all the time, not even what we call "the gospel." Uninterrupted and unrelieved biblical preaching would be just as monotonous as any other kind of unvaried preaching. All I maintain is that if the Bible is not to continue an ignored and unappreciated book, there will have to be a good deal more biblical preaching than we have recently been accustomed to.

The ground on which I make this plea for biblical preaching has already been indicated. But there are other considerations almost as important. First among these is the fact that biblical preaching — of the right sort, to be sure — is interesting. I was a good while coming to understand this. But one time, perhaps fifteen or twenty years ago, I

tried a biblical sermon. I suppose I did it because nobody had been killed that week who needed to be preached about, and nothing had happened in Japan or Italy or the League of Nations that required my elucidation, and I was hard pressed for a topic. I had been reading the old story of the Tower of Babel. So in a moment of hardihood — or perhaps of desperation — I said to myself, "I'll make a sermon out of that." I felt rather apologetic about it. Why drag my modern, up-to-the-minute people back to that far-off, long past and unfinished tower? But I couldn't think of anything else that week, and it had to do. To my astonishment, the comments on that sermon almost led me to suppose that the people of my congregation had been lying awake nights wondering about that old story. I puzzled myself about this. Perhaps people enjoyed getting away for a half hour from things that were forever thrust before their eyes by the newspapers and upon their ears at the women's clubs. Anyhow, they were interested.

I tried it again. I took about the most unlikely piece of homiletical material to be found in the entire Old Testament: the fifth chapter of Genesis. I went at it somewhat realistically. I inquired how these old gentlemen came to live so long, and what was wrong with modern medicine and hygiene that we could not compete with them. I asked how they amused themselves after they got to be five or six hundred years old. I raised the question whether they were ever sick, and, if they were, whether they had arthritis (I suppose it would have been rheumatism in their time) for ten or fifteen years as people do nowadays, or for a couple of hundred years. I asked whether the women lived as long as the men, and at what age any of them were supposed to

be grown up and fit to go out by themselves without their fathers or mothers. I went so far as to picture a party which Eve might have given for Adam in celebration of the nine-hundredth anniversary of his birth and of the creation of the world, and gave the names and the ages of those who would naturally have attended the party. In short, I treated it as one would treat the same story if he found it anywhere else but in the Bible. Then I told quite frankly what sort of story I thought it was: not history, but a lovely piece of folklore in which the Hebrews of a later time had pictured a golden age long past when a man was still a boy at fifty, in his prime at somewhere around six or seven hundred, and began to feel the approach of old age as he drew near the nine hundred mark. This seemed to be news to the people. And they seemed much interested in it. In fact this particular sermon was requested by and printed in the journal of one of our theological schools. Several years later I received a request for it from a former professor in another theological school, then retired and writing from Honolulu! I was again surprised. But I reflected that on this subject, as compared for example with the depression, I had an advantage over my people. The depression they knew as much about as I; but here was a subject on which I knew more than they did. Not a bad advantage to have over one's congregation! By and by I got over being surprised that people were interested in such sermons. I began to expect them to be. And I was never disappointed. Some preachers may have given up the hope of being interesting in the pulpit. To those who have not, but who find it difficult to be always interesting about what has happened during the last week — I recommend a certain amount of preaching of this sort on

the elementary ground that people will listen to it and ask for more.

But if such preaching were merely interesting, that would not carry us far. An ingenious and human preacher can make almost anything interesting. But this kind of preaching is informative — educative — in two ways. It is educative, first, as it concerns the Bible itself — what sort of book it is, how it grew up and got put together, what comparative value its various parts possess. All that most people have deduced from their meager acquaintance with modern biblical scholarship is that the Bible is not what their mothers thought it was, that it is not an authority, not infallible, that it does not show any clear and simple path to heaven, and that therefore they do not need any longer to read it. Any intelligent appreciation of it from the modern point of view they have had no means of getting.

It is a commonplace, for instance, among biblical students, that the Book of Jonah carries a message of the inclusive love of God, told in a manner apparently artless but actually full of a delicate literary art, unapproached elsewhere in the Old Testament. Indeed the author, with his charming reference to the "much cattle" that would have been destroyed if God had carried out his threat upon Nineveh as Jonah urged him to do, goes quite beyond anything else in either Old or New Testament. One has only to compare it with the passage in which Paul refers to the old law about not muzzling the ox that treads out the corn, and asks rather contemptuously whether God cares for oxen; the law really means that the preacher should be paid a salary. A truly wonderful book, Jonah; and yet, sad to say, in the popular mind it has degenerated into a joke. I do not remember to

have heard any popular reference to the story of Jonah except in a facetious vein. In a less degree the same thing has happened to Noah. When the Pomona College Glee Club sang in my church the song whose verses ended with the refrain, "Noah was a grand old man," the audience was redolent with glee. The college graduate who has forgotten all his "math," and cannot make out the Greek letters on the fraternity house door, can still recall some words of song in which he was wont to express his college spirit with reference to the exploits of Noah.

There are other instances, though these two are perhaps the most conspicuous, of passages of scripture that need to be rescued from the contempt or ridicule that has gathered around them. Isn't anybody ever going to rescue them? It is no small item when you take a passage of scripture that has become a mere byword, that has meant nothing to people, or still worse has come to mean quite the wrong thing, and make it mean what it ought to. And who is to do this if the preacher doesn't?

In addition to the sections of the Bible that need to be rescued and restored to their inherent meaning and dignity, there are other portions that give offense to people who have begun to think about their religion. There are those passages in the Book of Joshua that represent the whole population of Canaan as being exterminated by Joshua at the command of Jahweh. Is anything simpler or easier than to relieve people's minds of the bloodthirstiness both of Jahweh and of Israel, by calling attention to the simple fact that in the Book of Judges these people who are supposed to have been killed off are still there? And how much knowl-

edge of the higher criticism is necessary to enable the preacher to explain how this has happened?

Or take the miraculous element, in its grosser manifestations, in certain parts of the Old Testament. More people than we suppose are troubled by the miracles. What such people sometimes do to help themselves out of their difficulties if no one else will help them is truly astonishing. An old gentleman who bore the honorable title of colonel once came to me and said: "I don't believe for a minute that the walls of Jericho fell down at the blast of the trumpets. I've been in too many sieges to swallow any such nonsense. My theory is that they had those walls mined and countermined, and the trenches full of dynamite and gunpowder; and when they blew the trumpets, that was a sign to set the mines off. But of course they didn't tell the common soldiers about all this, so when the walls fell down they thought it was from the noise of the trumpets." That he had got himself into difficulties quite as serious as those from which he had extricated himself, did not seem to bother him. He was neither a historian nor an engineer, but just a plain soldier who had observed what kind of things happen and what kind of things do not happen in sieges. I do not remember whether I preached a sermon for his benefit on the fall of Jericho. If I did not I lost a grand opportunity.

This particular man, in spite of Jericho, continued to be a loyal church member and attendant upon divine services. But not everybody can so easily help himself out of his difficulties, or can ignore them and keep on with his church-going. Not long after the conversation concerning Jericho another man came into my study and said, "I would like to

belong to the church." I said, "Why don't you?" In reply he did not say as so many men do that he was not good enough. He said he couldn't because he didn't believe in the fall of man. It was so long since I had heard of the fall of man that I had almost forgotten about it. "Oh," I said, "has *he* fallen again?" "Not again," said he; "I mean the fall at the beginning of Genesis." This man had read something about evolution; he did not believe that the race started away up at the top of the hill and suddenly tumbled to the bottom. He said he believed we had come up steadily from the start. Yet there was the story of the fall of man, right at the beginning of the Bible. And in all his churchgoing he had never heard any preacher explain it or even refer to it. I told him that I was just going to a wedding, and that even if there were time the fall of man was not a subject to be discussed immediately before performing the marriage ceremony, but that if he would come to church next Sunday he would hear a sermon on the fall of man. He came, and later expressed himself as much relieved, though he had still other difficulties of much the same sort. But he was interested. And so was the congregation. Many people said to me: "Well, I've always wondered about that. It didn't seem as if it could have happened just as it is told. But nobody ever said anything about it"; until again I got the impression that the fall of man had been a subject of deep concern to all the housewives in my congregation. Had they forgotten their clothes and their children and given themselves up to the contemplation of Adam and Eve and the garden? Or was it only that they were glad for a half hour to forget more immediate concerns and to let the League of Nations and the cause of universal peace lie fallow while an

old question that had risen often in their minds, and to which they had never had an answer, was ventilated for them? Anyhow, and that is what I am after, it was interesting to them. And it seemed to set them free from something.

The miraculous element in the New Testament is a rather different, and a more complex affair. In the Old Testament, it is of the more stupendous sort. Or at least people are more conscious of it and take more offense at it.

Take, for instance, a story like that of Joshua's stopping the sun, or the plagues of Egypt, or Elijah on Mt. Carmel, or the axe swimming to the surface of the water. People know well enough that such things do not happen today. They have a shrewd suspicion that they never did happen. Yet there they are, part and parcel of the Bible story. And though it has somehow been borne in upon many people of recent years that they can believe in Jesus and live a Christian life irrespective of what Joshua or Elijah did or did not do, yet the presence of such material in the Bible, unexplained from the pulpit, unreferred to by the preacher as if he did not know it was there or was afraid to mention it, goes far to create the feeling that the Bible as a whole is a more or less unreliable book.

To things of this sort the preacher has the key — if he hasn't he can easily get it — in the higher criticism. He knows, for instance, that the stories of Elijah and Elisha are not part of the sober history of the kings of Israel and Judah, but fragments of old folklore for which the author can give no references or authorities as he does for the rest of his material, and which feel as much out of place in his otherwise historical account as a story of Jack the Giant Killer would be in a history of the Pilgrim Fathers. He knows that the

stories of the plagues of Egypt are part of the explanation, given many generations later, of how the new Jahweh triumphed over all the older and lesser gods. He knows how many centuries elapsed between the happening of the supposed events and the writing of the story as we now have it. By the use of this clue he transforms these stories from marvels which people ought to believe but can't, into what they really are; namely, attempts of the Hebrew mind, imaginative and unhistorical, at explaining and embellishing the origins of their religion.

I said this kind of biblical preaching is educative as it concerns the Bible itself. That is no small matter. But it is also educative in a wider sense. I said the most important kind of history is the story of the intellectual, moral and spiritual development of the race. It is a reflection upon our system of public education that a man can go through it from the primary school to the university and come out quite uninformed about this most important part of human history. That fact leaves a chance for the pulpit and the preacher. Most grown folks these days need religious education as badly as do the children. Moreover, logical or illogical as it may be, the attitude of a man toward changes in religious thought in his own time is pretty certain to go back to his view of the Bible. If he sees that book as a static affair, his own religion will be static or reactionary. A conspicuous example of this attitude was the late William Jennings Bryan. In politics he was a liberal. He came home from Europe just before the opening of a presidential campaign, and advocated a lot of semisocialistic ideas, since then largely adopted by Republican or Democratic administrations, but at that moment so far advanced as to put an end to all po-

litical hopes for Mr. Bryan. In politics decidedly a progressive — but in religion a reactionary. What was the trouble? It was that he had a certain idea of the Bible, and that this old conservative idea which he had of it seemed to him to lie at the foundation of all true religion. Against Mr. Scopes' evolutionary doctrines he did not maintain that they were at variance with modern scholarship. Nor that they degraded man. Not anything of that sort. He merely alleged that they contradicted the Bible — as of course they did. But that fact, for Mr. Bryan, as for thousands of other people, was quite enough. Mr. Bryan was an able man; distinctly so. But nobody had ever taught him anything about the Bible.

When you encounter a man who is ready to die for his particular theory of the atonement, you will generally find that he considers that doctrine to be contained not only in the gospels and the epistles but in the prophets and the Book of Genesis. It would be easier for him to change his own mind if he knew that anyone else had ever done so. "The best critique of dogma is the history of dogma." Whoever understands that the Bible has no one conception of God, no one ethic, no one idea of salvation, no one anything, but many shades and varieties of all such things, continually shifting and growing, has the basis for a progressive religious thought of his own. I have spoken disrespectfully of a modernism that is cut off from and does not grow out of a knowledge and appreciation of the past. The best modernism, the most progressive and the least intolerant, is that which issues from and is justified by some knowledge of the changes through which religious thought and experience have passed in other times. When one sees that this is true

not merely in Christian times but in the process that lies back of Christianity itself and is pictured in the Bible, that is an educative and liberating insight. And of all this, as of much else, the Bible, to the preacher who knows it as he can and should, is the greatest of all source books.

When, therefore, I say that it is time for a renaissance of biblical preaching, I mean biblical preaching not of the same kind that was done or could be done fifty or a hundred years ago. "Expository" preaching, in which you take a passage, say from one of Paul's epistles, and try to show what Paul did and did not mean, the assumption being that when you get down to what he did mean you have a truth for all time that cannot be questioned, will still appeal to people who like either to do it or to listen to it. With or without that assumption there will always be a place for it. But that is not what I have in mind. The biblical preaching which gives no insight into the historical, literary, ethical or religious significance of biblical material, but too often reads into it a spiritual implication which is not there and which would have astonished the original author of it—neither do I refer to that kind of preaching. Nor have I in mind preaching that is remote from life and from the particular and concrete questions with which people of the present time are confronted. I have in mind a kind of biblical preaching that could not be done in earlier generations because the biblical knowledge on which it is based had not yet developed. I mean a biblical preaching resting upon the best biblical knowledge now available, with a perfectly frank acceptance of the modern point of view, with the conviction that this point of view has for this generation religious advantages over any other. But I mean real preach-

ing, not the handing out of raw or unassimilated pieces of information about the Bible; preaching to people on matters that they need to be preached to about, but shot through with an appreciation of the Bible on the part of the preacher that will make the old book a new book and the dead book a living book to his hearers.

It should be obvious — even if it is not obvious it is true — that this modern approach to the Bible brings into the homiletic field a vast amount of biblical material which from the older point of view was of no use to the preacher. Take for illustration two passages already referred to, the story of the plagues and that of the long-lived worthies. On the old hypothesis that the Bible is everywhere equally the work of God, all the preacher could do with the story of the plagues was to explain away the difficulties as best he could, maintain the possibility of happenings which he feared his people would not believe in spite of his best efforts, and exhort them to renewed faith in God with whom all things are possible. In recent years, except for the Fundamentalists who continue this practice although they do not need to, few preachers have done even this. They have preferred to let these passages alone. They have hoped that their people would not notice them — a hope that has been increasingly justified as people have let the whole Bible more and more alone. Or they have left it to the popular assumption that God used to do things in a way wholly different from the way he does them now. On the older theory of the Bible the puzzling things had to be “proved.” On any theory one must admit that it is easier to let them alone. But for the modern preacher that is certainly a great waste of such biblical information as he should have at his command. For from

the modern point of view the old story of the plagues, for instance, not only ceases to be a stumbling block to faith, but becomes a significant chapter in the popular Hebrew history of the Jahweh religion. When people see not merely that religion had a history, but that in the telling of it, as the years and generations went by, the Hebrew historians used their imaginations in truly oriental fashion but always with a truly religious purpose, to strengthen the popular faith in Jahweh, they see the story of the plagues and the deliverance from Egypt in a new, an interesting, an instructive and (if we may be so bold) in a true light.

In the second instance, that of the long-lived worthies, on the older theory of the Bible what was that story good for, to the preacher? Or to his people? Not a thing. You believed it or not. Either way, nothing followed. But when people know that like all other ancient peoples the Hebrews pictured a golden age in the distant past, and that part of this picture was a long, long life, then this story has fallen into its place in Hebrew psychology. Then also it becomes something of worth to the preacher who points out how necessary death is in life, and how any indefinite postponement of it would produce more difficulties than it would dispel; and how the golden age is not in the past, not in the first nine hundred or thousand years of the history of the world, not even in New Testament times, not anywhere in the past, but in the future.

The passages which I shall cite from the Old Testament as being specially open to the kind of treatment I have in mind, will be for the most part from the historical books. Yet other books lend themselves equally to similar use. In a time when there is so much pessimism about, why should

not one preach, for instance, a sermon on "Optimism, Pessimism, and the Christian Faith"? If he desired to do so, from what point could he better start than from almost any passage in the Book of Ecclesiastes? If he should do that he would naturally want to explain to his people that this book, so long attributed to Solomon, was apparently not written by him nor in his time. He might remark how much wiser and more broad-minded the makers of the Old Testament canon were than are most of us, since we would have excluded any such pessimistic book from any Bible we had been compiling. As to the usual causes and grounds for pessimism, the distinction between various kinds of optimism, the bearing of both optimism and pessimism upon the spiritual life, and the relation of a genuine religious faith upon the temperament of the holder of it — this is all suggested by the book, and is certainly appropriate to the times in which we live. But, incidentally, there are also laid bare in it the grounds upon which modern biblical scholars make up their minds as to where a given biblical book came from and as to who did or did not write it. A sermon from Ecclesiastes might convey both good cheer and information. Since so much information is acquired at the expense of good cheer, why lose this opportunity?

In the ninth chapter of the Book of Judges there is a sample of a kind of literature of which we have but little in the Bible. It was a common and even favorite type of literature among ancient people, especially among the Greeks. It is the fable of Jotham. It is sometimes called a parable; and so it is except for the fact that the trees and bushes talk. But as a fable it is worthy of Aesop. The trees want a king. They ask the olive tree to be king, but he will not. He likes his

present job better. They ask the fig tree but he also declines. He does not care to "leave his sweetness and go to wave to and fro over the trees." The vine, being similarly approached, likewise declines. He produces something that "cheers God and man"; he thinks there is no prospect of doing that by being king. So the trees in despair approach the bramble. He accepts instantler, with joy and perfect self-confidence. Lifting his measly little head he exhorts the big trees to come and get under his shadow; if not, he says, "let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon." Could anything be more modern? Is there any city in America where any one of the fifty best men could be induced to run for mayor? They will grumble endlessly about the city government; but go to any first-class man among them, offer him the nomination for the mayoralty and assure him positively of election, and he will tell you that he is sorry but his business absolutely forbids him to consider it. But the bramble, whose head is not high enough for anybody to get under his shade, but from whom fire is likely to break out to burn up the whole town — he will accept. Our political troubles, local or national, are not in our forms of government but in the personnel of our governing bodies. The simple fact is, the men who are best qualified to govern us will not be bothered with it. And so long as they will not we shall have to turn to the bramble. The New England preachers used to preach every year an "election sermon." There is more call now for such a sermon than there was then. Why not try one on Jotham's fable?

The great source of distinctively Christian ideas for the preacher is of course the New Testament. The Old Testa-

ment on the other hand, owing to the field which it covers, affords much more of the history of religion. It is also that part of the Bible in which questions as to dates, authorship, manner of composition, et cetera, are most easily illustrated and can be discussed with the minimum of offense. I take the larger part of my material therefore from the Old Testament. Occasionally there is a passage which involves both Old and New Testaments. This is clearly the case where Old Testament passages are quoted in the New Testament. I give as an example of the possible treatment of this latter type of passage the following sermon on the words of Jesus.

REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE

Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;

But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.

Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.

In that day, he which shall be upon the housetops, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back.

Remember Lot's wife.

St. Luke 17:28-32.

This statement about Lot and the fate that overtook his wife sends us back to the original story in the Book of Genesis. Lot was a nephew of Abraham. He and Abraham used to graze their sheep in the same pasture. The sheep outgrew the pasture and Lot moved to Sodom. Who his wife was, the story does not say. She is not dignified by a name of her own. There must have been something else worth remembering about her. But she lives in history for

one thing; for one very unfortunate thing. As the Lot family went out of Sodom, Lot walking ahead, his wife behind him, she looked back.

Poor lady, how could she help it? The town where she had lived, the little house that had been home to her, with all its contents, all the little household gods and goods, the precious and pretty accumulations of a lifetime so dear to a woman's heart — all going up in smoke. I ask you now, if you had been in her place, and your husband walking on ahead where he couldn't see, wouldn't you have looked back?

But she had been told not to do so. And she turned into a pillar of salt. I suppose Lot missed her, though nothing is said about that. He went on and left her standing there. And there for many centuries travelers in the region of the Dead Sea have reported that they have seen her.

Though until recently this story was accepted, like everything else in the Bible, as literal history, the difficulties in it must always have been plain enough.

There is first the legendary element. The angels who advised Lot to leave town and told him what was going to happen do not appeal to us as historical. At least, it is a long time now since God sent any angels to warn people of impending disasters. For a long time, however, we were satisfied to say that God does things now in a certain way, but a long time ago he did them very differently.

In the second place, cities are always the rendezvous of bad characters. But they are also, in all ages, and in all countries, the centers of art, education and religion. How big the town of Sodom was supposed to be the author does not say. But it does not seem natural that there should be

only one good man in it. I have never seen a town so small that it did not have more than one good man.

In the next place, the method of the destruction of the city is, to say the least, an uncommon one. Today we like to hold up Chicago as the type of city on the verge of destruction because of its wickedness. But nobody looks to see God send down fire and brimstone, even on Chicago.

The destruction of Sodom is often explained as the probable result of an eruption of petroleum caused by an earthquake. The chief trouble with this hypothesis is that there is no mention of either petroleum or earthquake in the story. The author says it was fire and brimstone. And he says explicitly that it came down from heaven. To make the destruction of Sodom a natural event spoils the point of the story. Nothing was farther from the writer's mind.

Probably what kept this story circulating as genuine history for so long were the reports of travelers who had seen Lot's wife. It is not the only story that has been kept alive on the same sort of evidence. Is there not the imprint of Buddha's feet on stones in Siam and Ceylon? Have not some of you seen the place in Rome where Peter, fleeing from persecution in the city, suddenly met his Master and asked in amazement, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" "To Rome, to be crucified again," said the Master. Peter returned to martyrdom, but there in the solid rock you can still see the footprint of Jesus. The Arabs have a stone at Mecca, into which an angel was changed who neglected to keep Adam away from the forbidden fruit, as the Lord had told him to do. So it is with Lot's wife.

In the first century Josephus says, "I have seen her statue, and it remains to this day." Irenaeus, a century later, be-

lieved not only that Lot's wife was there in salt, but that her soul still lingered about the statue. The cattle licked it, but it never grew smaller, being miraculously preserved in size. People believed it had to stay there until the general resurrection. Travelers, to be sure, did not always see her in the same place. Sometimes she had moved twenty or thirty miles. She was not always of the same size. A traveler of the sixteenth century reported her as lying down; but a hundred years later another found her standing, and accompanied by a dog also turned into salt; and some travelers said she was not there at all.

The fact seems to be that the region where Lot's wife has so often been seen was once part of the bed of the salt sea. A range of cliffs several miles long, made of crystallized rock salt, is continually being washed by the rain into pillars of various sizes and shapes that stand out in front of the mountain. They are constantly being made and remade by the action of the weather. From time to time one of these natural formations has been identified with Lot's wife — never the same for very long, because they never last very long. But a new one is always taking the place of an old one as it disappears, and that is why she has moved occasionally.

If this old legend no longer appears to us as history, there are several reasons, but primarily two. In the first place, we have an understanding about the reign of natural law which the ancients did not have. We know too many stories of the kind told in other lands about other persons. As nearly as we can tell, things do not happen this way. And second, we know, as our fathers did not, that the story of Lot's wife was written in our Book of Genesis about a thousand years

after the events which it describes. A thousand years is a long time.

Formerly, when questions were raised about the historical character of this story, they were treated as direct attacks upon Christianity. Efforts to substantiate this story by travelers were part of a long controversy concerning the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. It is clear to us, I hope, that the accuracy of such stories in the Old Testament has nothing to do with Christianity.

There is, however, a further difficulty. Jesus refers to this story. He gives no hint that he considers it anything but historical fact. If he so refers to it, and if it did not happen, does this not show a lack of knowledge on his part? And is not that a reflection upon him?

To this, two things are to be said. First: Jesus accepted the history of his people as he did their science or geography, as these circulated in his time. He was not a student of history, and to picture him as somehow possessed of a knowledge of the history of his people which he had received by divine revelation, or which was born in him, makes him quite other than human.

In the second place: I am not sure that it is Jesus who refers to Lot and his wife. I rather think it is Luke himself. For Luke believed in the near approach of the end of the world, and the second coming, and took every opportunity to warn his generation to get them ready for this great event. Like all other ancient writers, he used no quotation marks. It is often difficult to know exactly what words he intends to attribute to Jesus, and which are to be taken as his own. But wherever he writes of warnings about the second coming, and says, "So shall it be when the son of

man is revealed " — thus speaking of Jesus in the third person, and not by his own name but by a title given him after his death — I should say that it is reasonably clear that it is Luke and not Jesus who is speaking.

What we have, therefore, in the Gospel of Luke at this point is a reference to the old story of Lot's wife — either by Jesus himself, or by Luke, as you choose — used to point a moral.

More than this moral, indeed, comes out of this old story and what I have said about it.

First: There comes out of it the realization of how often we have confused historical with religious questions. How many arguments have we heard about Joshua's stopping the sun; about whether there ever was a flood that destroyed the human race; whether Jonah lived three days in the belly of the whale and wrote an ode, his head meanwhile wrapped 'round with seaweed! It has taken us a good while to see that such things have no more to do with belief in Jesus Christ or with the Christian life of people these days than do the exploits of Hercules or the story of Romulus and Remus. But if we do see it now, it relieves us of the necessity of defending many indefensible things.

Second: Myth and legend can carry truth as well as history can; not historical truth, of course; not truth about what actually happened; but practical truth, moral and religious truth. The effect of the story of King Lear and his daughters does not depend upon whether there ever was such a man — and such daughters. It depends simply upon the story itself. I do not suppose there was necessarily a man who took his inheritance and went off to feed it to the swine, as Jesus tells in the story of the prodigal son. I

suppose Jesus just made up the story. That makes no difference in regard to its moral and spiritual value.

Third: But the moral of the story is, of course, in the implied admonition not to look back. And especially not to look back, not to be consumed with regret at the loss of some physical or material good, when we are started on some moral and spiritual venture. Christianity was born in the conviction that a new era was at hand. A great change was coming. Only those were fit for it whose eyes were on the future. If early Christendom mistook the exact nature of the change that was coming, no matter. Those whose eyes were fixed upon the past, who were not ready to let the old world and the old life perish, would never see the glories and taste the joys of the one that was coming.

So it has been and is in all epochs of sudden transformation. We live in such an epoch right now. Ushered in by the World War, only gradually disclosing its true character, it becomes apparent now that one era has come to an end and another is beginning. Exactly what is in store for us in this new era, or just how it will differ from the old, no one can say in detail. No one at any period of marked transition can ever say that. But it is just as true now as when Lot went out of Sodom, or Luther nailed his thesis to the church door, or the Pilgrims sailed from Leyden, that any man who looks back, harks back, wishes he were back, is not fit for the newer Kingdom of God. Much that was dear to us has gone up in smoke in the last few years — much money, much position, still worse, much reputation. These things we cannot help seeing and regretting as we go past them. Nobody who stops to look at them will be turned into a pillar of salt, but we have already shed tears

enough over these to make a whole mountain of salt. But those who will inherit the new age and help it to come, and to be, as it comes, something better than the old regime from which we are emerging, are those who look forward and not back.

Remember Lot's wife.

PART ONE

THE OLD TESTAMENT

CHAPTER ONE

FAMILIAR PASSAGES

I HAVE made a plea for a certain kind of biblical preaching and cited several passages especially open to this treatment. In the following chapters I wish to show how vast and varied is the biblical material that can be used in this way. It is indeed almost endless. The passages I select for treatment are no better than any number of others which might be chosen. They are only hints of what may be found if one looks for it.

For purposes of clearness I shall gather the material I use under certain classifications, though these will often overlap. I put certain passages under the head "human interest stories," because the human element is the outstanding thing about them. But some of these serve to raise historical or critical questions, quite as well as the passages which I have listed as being more fruitful for that purpose. In this chapter I shall speak more generally and without stopping for classification.

In any consideration of such material as I have in mind, one comes at once upon certain passages that have been meat and drink to preachers of all times. Every preacher has either preached on them, or thought that at some time he would do so, for they are the passages whose homiletical value is most obvious. These familiar passages do not require extensive treatment. My justification for considering

them at all is the fact that some of them may well be used in a more critical and educative way than that in which they have been generally employed.

Foremost among such passages is the dream of Jacob (Gen. 28:11-22) of the angels of God ascending and descending upon the ladder. The story is heavy with the accumulated religious sentiment of many generations, and is one of the finest illustrations anywhere to be found, of the power of a genuine work of art to perpetuate and renew itself in the heart of mankind. For the story is a work of art, lovely as a Greek vase and moving as any lyric poem. Across the centuries it makes its appeal to the religious feeling, till Charles Wesley turns it into his hymn, "Nearer, my God, to Thee." When the passengers on the Titanic wait for the ship to go down, they give expression to their confidence and hope not in any modern words, however lovely, but in the words of this old dream of Jacob, turned into verse by Charles Wesley.

But its rich and obvious spiritual and homiletic content is not greater than its historical and critical suggestiveness. The story is told to account for the name of a holy place. How large a part this particular holy spot played in the life of the Hebrews; how Jeroboam used it to cement together the part of the kingdom which fell to him after the revolt against Rehoboam, how contemptuously Amos referred to it, and how Josiah many years later destroyed and desecrated it, may be quickly ascertained by a reference to the word Bethel in any Bible dictionary. What kind of worship went on there in later times, and what the real differences were between the worship of Jahweh as the prophets understood it and the worship of the Baals at Bethel, would doubtless

take one too far from one's subject, though it is all involved in any consideration of Bethel. Indeed the chief difficulty in treating any item so full of historical suggestion as this little story, lies in knowing where to stop. But certainly germane to any sermon on this story are the items of the name itself, the sacred stone and what made it sacred, the idea of dreams as a revelation of God, the origin of the tithe among the Hebrews, and the character of Jacob's religion as indicated by his bargain with Jahweh.

Now this is to be a sermon, not a lecture on Jacob or Bethel. It therefore behooves the preacher to show that there is a "house of God" (if he believes there is; and if he doesn't, why is he preaching?), but not made of stone, and to explain what he thinks it is made of. Also that there is a ladder up and down which angels, or their modern substitutes, do go and come, and how up this ladder not merely angels but such poor folks as we can and do climb. The sermon of the sermon, so to speak, will of course lie in this latter part. But sometimes what is incidental to a sermon is quite as valuable as what is primary to it. And why should not one use this lovely little story to introduce his people to the entire group of ancient religious ideas imbedded in it?

A passage equally familiar and quite as frequently used is the other story about Jacob's wrestling with the angel (Gen. 32:22-32). In Frederick Robertson's sermon on this passage — which I hope is still read, at least by theological students — he drops a hint as to the mythical element in the narrative. But how much there is here of a critical and educative character in addition to this item! Here is the idea of revelation in dreams, as in the other story. Dreams

have been reinstated — at least for many people — as an instrument of revelation, by Sigmund Freud. If the preacher has reason to suppose that any of his people are too much under the influence of exaggerated or one-sided notions in this matter, here is a good chance for him to say a sober word about it. (As an antidote to Freud, he might read the thirteenth chapter of Rignano's *The Psychology of Reasoning*.) But this, of course, is to get modern in the midst of a sermon on an ancient theme. Let us get back to the content of the story. There is the idea of the gods as living up in the sky, but as occasionally coming down, either personally or through their messengers. There is the idea that they may take up their abode temporarily in a particular object, like a stone. There is the idea that the supernal beings are not always friendly and that one may sometimes have to defend himself against them. And there is, especially, the idea that the heavenly beings, like men, have their individual and personal names; and that the name of a person, either earthly or heavenly, has some mysterious and inherent connection with the person, so that to get his name gives one a power over him. So the heavenly beings generally keep their names secret, for they do not wish to betray to earthly beings what may put them partially into their power. Even today it is said that in remote parts of China the peasant will not tell the traveler his name, as he will not allow him to take his photograph. How can he tell what the stranger may do with his name? Whose business is it but his own? So Jahweh, in the later form which the story of the burning bush assumed, does not tell Moses his name but returns an equivocal answer to his request for it. So Jesus, when he would cast out a demon, first asked

him his name. The knowledge of a name gave a man some inside hold on the owner of it. So the angel (if it was not Jahweh himself) will not reveal his name, though Jacob threatens to hold him till he does. He, however, knows the name of Jacob, and gives him a better one in exchange for it. One recalls how the "name," later on in Hebrew and early Christian literature, developed almost into a charm: "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk"; "there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved." In such passages the name seems to have become synonymous with the person.

All this, again, is incidental; for this is not a lecture about Jacob or about dreams or names. But obviously it does not hinder the preacher from drawing the natural hortative materials out of the story, and it is (or I wonder if I am wrong about this) interesting and informative. It makes people see some of the things that are involved in the story but are not on the surface of it.

I said that the story was told to account for the name of a holy place. But it explains two other things as well. It explains how Jacob came to be called Israel, and why the Hebrews do not eat the sciatic muscle. The latter is sacred or taboo because God touched it in the body of Jacob. But there are things that do have the touch of God upon them. What are they? And for another item, there is the question of "wrestling with God in prayer." How proper, or how necessary, is that today? Sermons on prayer are not always helpful. They often put into the minds of people difficulties concerning prayer which are real to the preacher but had not occurred to his hearers until he mentioned them. A good woman in one of my congregations once told me that

after she heard a sermon on prayer it generally took her a couple of weeks to get back to praying again. But a little wholesome exhortation about prayer, not going so elaborately into the technique or the psychology of it as to disturb the natural foundations for it, but just assuming the basis for it that exists in every human heart, a few really human remarks on prayer, come home to people helpfully. This, if one chose so to make it, might be the natural high point of the sermon as a sermon. But incidentally the sermon will have thrown light also upon one little section of that long spiritual path which the souls of men have walked.

At least two other passages in the Book of Genesis are quite as familiar, and quite as much favorites with preachers, as these stories of Jacob. They are the stories of the birthright that was sold too cheap and the blessing that was stolen (Gen. 25:27-34; Gen. 27). The moral lessons are obvious and will be substantially the same whoever draws them. But the old idea of the blessing and the curse as things which, once spoken, cannot be withdrawn but have a magical power that works on irrespective of the intention of the speaker; the historical reasons for the fact that while the reader's sympathy is with Esau, the writer's is as obviously with Jacob; the fact of human exploitation, beautifully illustrated by Jacob's treatment of his brother in the matter of the birthright, not confined either to him or to his racial descendants but well exemplified in some of our modern captains of industry; the existence of petticoat government among the patriarchs — all this and much more which sets the inquisitive listener to thinking about the beginnings of religion and the changes that have come over it may be quite as valuable as the merely moral lessons which are so

obvious in these ancient stories. As to the stealing of the blessing, I may pause to remark that while the Prayer Book still contains in the marriage prayer the reference to Isaac and Rebecca as having "lived faithfully together" I personally avoid this reference. If any bride should remember it, and run across the story of what Rebecca did to Isaac when he was old and bedridden, the influence upon her might not be good.

Of these more familiar and often used passages it is not necessary to speak in more detail. If anyone is interested in seeing what one preacher did with the story of Jacob's dream, here is a sermon entitled

THE HEAVENLY LADDER

And Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and tarried there all night because the sun was set; and he took one of the stones of that place and put it down for his pillow, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached up to heaven; and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. And Jacob waked from his sleep and said, How awesome is this place; this is the house of God and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el.

Genesis 28:8-12, 16-19.

The Old Testament is one of the few instructive books in everybody's library. And it has this advantage over practically every other book there: it is the only ancient book; the only book that mirrors in a perfectly natural way the ideas and customs of a time long past. Many people get excited over discoveries made in Egypt when they could

themselves dig more ancient ideas and customs out of the Old Testament.

There were certain ideas that belonged to all ancient religion, the Hebrew religion with the rest; and three or four of these are brought together in this little story about Jacob. These ideas are: first, the sacredness of certain natural objects, particularly stones; second, revelation by dreams, and especially those dreamed in a temple or other sacred place; third, the idea of a heavenly ladder.

First, then, for the sacred stone. In all primitive religion the sacred stone held a place of great honor. In villages of Central Africa, South India and the Samoan Islands, many such stones are to be seen. The black rock of Mecca is still an object of Mohammedan veneration. The Arabs and the ancient Greeks worshiped certain stones. Not that they thought the stone was in and of itself a god. But it was the place where, either permanently or for the time, the god was.

If you ask, Why stones? I answer: Other natural objects were sacred too; springs, wells, rivers, trees — as they still are in many parts of the world. But stones had their own characteristics. If the stone was a big one it impressed people by its massiveness. Perhaps it had some peculiar shape, looked like a man or a superman. If it was a little one it could be carried in the pocket or set up in the tent. Little or big, it was solid, substantial; it didn't change like a bush or a stream, and man had not made it. It was part of the creation as it came fresh from the hand of God.

The sacred stone was usually anointed with oil, not to make it sacred, though partly no doubt to mark it as such; but back of that was a simpler and better reason. The god

or the spirit was in the stone. When you made an offering to the god you naturally made it where the god was and where he would get it. When the ancient worshiper poured oil on the sacred stone, and the stone drank it in, his libation had reached the god who dwelt within.

Old customs live on after their origin is forgotten or their meaning is gone. So until the end of the eighteenth century the peasants in certain backward parts of Norway used to keep round stones "which every Thursday evening they smeared with butter or other grease before the fire." (See Frazer, *Folk Lore in the Old Testament*.) On the sacred stone at Delphi the Greeks poured oil every day; and twenty years ago an American missionary watched some Syrian peasants anointing the sacred stones of their village, out of a can marked "The Standard Oil Company of New Jersey." So much for the sacred stone, universal in ancient religion.

Second: it was the universal belief in ancient times that God revealed himself in dreams. When the man himself was asleep, and had no control of his own thoughts, when his spirit seemed to travel to faraway places, or the voices of dead men spoke in his ear, or the forms of distant friends appeared in his tent, it was then, naturally, that he thought that God spoke most directly to him. The Old Testament is full of this idea. When the author of Ecclesiastes said that a dream "came through a multitude of business," that is, when a man had too much on his mind, he announced a great heresy. For everybody in ancient times believed God spoke in dreams. Some people believe it yet.

But if God could speak in an ordinary dream, there was one kind of dream in which he could make himself particularly clear. That was a dream dreamed in a place that

was sacred to him and where in some special sense he lived. If the child Samuel had dreamed his dream out in the field, or in his own little bed at home, Eli would have paid less heed to it. But he dreamed it in the sacred tent at Shiloh, and both he and Eli were sure it was from Jehovah.¹ In all ancient times a favorite way of receiving an oracle was to sleep in the temple or near to the shrine of the god. At Delphi the man who had lost his oxen, or the woman who had no children and wanted them, paid the priest for a night's lodging, slept and dreamed in the sacred place and went away comforted. Sick people used to sleep in the sanctuary of Aesculapius in Greece, and if they got the right dream they knew what to do for their troubles, or waked and found themselves cured. If people were in difficulty and wanted guidance from the gods, nothing was more natural than for them to get it in dreams at the place where the god was to be found.

There was no temple nor ark nor other sacred dwelling on the road to Haran. But Jacob was in trouble. He had deceived his father and robbed his brother, and he was starting out not only to begin life in a strange country but to look for a wife. Trouble enough for any one man! And though there was no ark or temple there and he had to lie down by the side of the road, there was this stone; and not content with creeping under it or lying down as near to it as he could, he put his dishonest head upon it and fell off into glorious dreams. And when he awoke he said, "This is an awesome place; this stone is a sacred stone," and he called it Beth-el, "House of God." And he poured oil upon it and worshiped.

¹ In these sermons I use the form "Jehovah" for obvious reasons.

And the dream he had was like that which many ancient dreamers in sacred places must have had. For the idea of a ladder between earth and heaven was also common in the ancient world. The texts in the Egyptian pyramids speak often of the ladder by which the dead kings climb to the sky. In Egyptian tombs there is still found occasionally a little stone ladder, put there undoubtedly for the soul to use when it wakes from its sleep. The natives of Madagascar still believe the souls of the dead climb to heaven on such a ladder. Some of the natives of West Africa told Miss Kingsley that in the days of their ancestors there used to be a ladder between heaven and earth, so that the gods could come down and attend properly to the affairs upon the earth. They even explained why the ladder had disappeared. A little boy, they said, had once started to climb it and his mother, fearing he would fall, had followed him. The gods did not want women and boys in heaven, so they pulled the ladder up and had never let it down again. The Hebrews said that Jehovah, when he wanted to talk with Moses, came down the side of the mountain. That was much more dignified and majestic. But in earlier times, and where there were no mountains around, it was a ladder.

How this story came to be told a thousand years later and so was handed down to us, is also simple enough. Beth-el was one of the great religious centers of the Hebrew people. The people of northern Israel used to go there as the Catholics go to Rome or the Mohammedans to Mecca. And when they got there and asked, "Why do we come away up here? Why don't we do all this at home?" the answer was, "Because here is the sacred stone." If they asked "How did the town get its name?" the priest replied, "From the stone,

which was the original Beth-el or House of God." And if they asked "Why is this stone so much more sacred than others?" the answer was, "This is the identical stone on which our father Jacob laid his head on the night he ran away from Esau. It is the same stone on which he slept when he dreamed his dream and saw the heavenly ladder."

Now, besides what I have said as I have gone along, I have two or three more things to say about this old story and the ideas imbedded in it. First: never confuse the origin of a thing with its present value, nor judge its value by its origin. The orchestra is developed out of the tom-toms and the rams' horns of the savage, but that does not affect the sweetness of the symphony. Man is the descendant of lower forms of life, but he is the same great and wonderful creature, dreaming his dreams and building his civilizations and peopling the world with the creations of his fancy as if he had come from heaven full grown. Religion began in superstition — where else could it begin? But a free man's worship, and the glad co-operation of the human spirit with the spirit that lives in nature and in mankind, is the finest thing we have. The origins of all great things are humble. Never confuse the value with the origin, nor judge the first by the second.

Second: how wonderful in its power to live and to affect endless generations of men is any work of real art, however small. For that is what this old story is. A work of art, quite as truly as a statue of Phidias or a drama of Shakespeare. Just a little story, but told with the inimitable skill of the ancient storyteller, with the simplicity of Homer or Aesop — a genuine work of art, like a fragment of a Greek vase dug out of the sands. People have read it over and over again for three thousand years, often not knowing

exactly what it meant or how to take it, but always feeling in it the haunting sense of beauty that belongs to all perfectly simple and elemental things. Simplicity, directness, color — the man, the lonely road, the sun going down, the rocks, the ladder, just half-a-dozen strokes, but out of them a picture that lives through the ages.

This is the day of science, and sometimes we speak as if science had the last word on everything. That is nonsense. Science is only another name for knowledge, and knowledge is a great human good. But art is higher than science, as appreciation is deeper than knowledge and beauty more powerful than mere fact. God uses the skill of man, his cunning with color or form or words, his voice, his genius, any peculiar appeal of him, to touch the hearts and waken the minds of other men for generations to come. So a century ago, three thousand years after this old story was written, Charles Wesley turned it into verse that is sung the world around:

Though like a wanderer, the sun gone down,
Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;
Yet in my dreams I'd be
Nearer, my God, to thee.

An admirer of Dr. Washington Gladden once remarked that after all of Dr. Gladden's social theories were forgotten he would be remembered by his Williams College hymn, "The Mountains," and by "O Master, let me walk with thee." Probably so. For in his social pronouncements there is only right or wrong, true or false, but here is also the touch of beauty. If Lincoln had said everything he did say, but said it in an ugly and inartistic manner, it would not have

moved us. This little story of Jacob lives because it is a work of art. And art also is a revelation — a revelation of the beauty that is superior to all time and place, the beauty that is infinite and eternal, that is with God and that is God.

Third: There *is* a house of God, but it is not made out of stone. It is in the heart of man. It is made out of convictions, the great assurances that go down to their foundations deep below all dogmas and all reasoned beliefs. That there is a moral order of the world, and that the stars in their courses fight against evil; that wrong may dig itself in along the whole front of our human battle, and all manner of lies and subterfuges and immemorial customs be piled up before it; but that the batteries of a spiritual universe are trained against it and in the end all its defenses will be level with the ground; that gentleness is always better than cruelty, and purity than impurity and the truth than a lie; that selfishness and hatred are of the devil, but that love is the key that opens all doors — upon such foundations, deep in the soul of every man, rests the house of God in the human heart.

It is built of hopes that reach out through the years, not for ourselves alone but for the better world we hope to see here; of the deep misgivings that visit us concerning the value of all our material progress, our mechanical success and our piled up wealth; of the divine discontent that rises in us to sweep away our conceit and lay our pride in the dust; of the compassion that tugs at our heartstrings and makes us ready to suffer and to give; of the conscience that will not let us sleep, and the faith that will not allow us to despair, and the love upon which we daily live — of such things is the house of God built in the heart of man. And

whoever speaks a kind word to a child, or gives a cup of water to a thirsty soul as Jesus said, whoever turns his back upon his own advantage for the greater profit of some other human soul, whoever follows the example of Jesus and loses his life that others may find theirs, pushes down to a deeper bedrock the foundations of that house, or builds its stories higher into the blue, and makes it more spacious and beautiful for the souls of men to dwell in.

And finally there is a ladder, up and down which the angels go to dispel our fear and heal us of our pain; only this ladder is not seen in our sleep but when the eyes of our spirits are the most awake. It is made up of memories that stretch back into our childhood, and that lay their hallowed hand upon our shoulders to turn us from an evil path, or throw their shadowy arms around us to hold us back from the precipice; of good deeds done for our sakes by hands long turned to dust; of words of sanity and wisdom said for our guidance, spoken directly into our ears or coming to us from the great and wise of the earth whom we have never seen; of names almost forgotten but leaping to our consciousness now and again like rescuers out of the dark; of strong men and devoted women who counted no cost and stopped at no sacrifice, but wrought their lives like angels or like gods; of the great tides of holy impulse that beat through this common world out of the hearts of heroes and martyrs and of humble folks who came and went before our eyes like spirits from a better world — Oh, yes, there is a ladder that rests right here upon the common ground where we all walk, and stretches up to the heavens above our reach. There is a ladder, and God lets it down before our wondering eyes and keeps it there forever for us to

climb on. As we rest for a night among the rocks like old Jacob, surrounded by darkness and encompassed with fears, God gives us still the ladder. And weak as we are, feeble in our grasp and uncertain in our footing, up that ladder, I trust, though slowly and painfully and with now and then a backward slip, we all do nevertheless climb.

I add a sermon on The Wrestling of Jacob. If any reader has preached too recently on this incident, or has already read too many sermons drawn from it, he can easily skip it.

THE WRESTLING OF JACOB

Based on Genesis 32:22-32.

Seeking for something that might take us for the moment from our absorption in the depression and from the music and speeches that drive in over the radio, I take you back today to a story in the Book of Genesis.

We shall never understand this Book of Genesis till we recognize that it is not history in any modern sense. Most of its events have no historical importance. They are stories, folklore — how Esau was red-headed and Benjamin left-handed, and Leah had sore eyes and was jealous of Rachel, old traditions about the founders of great families, and many “unimportant anecdotes of country life” like these. But they are tremendously human and are told with incomparable skill. That is why they outlive the speeches of politicians, the plots and counterplots of statesmen, and the rise and fall of nations. That, and the fact that they have often an unsuspected amount of wisdom in them.

Jacob was not an admirable character. He deceived his

father when the latter was on his deathbed. He wheedled his brother out of his birthright. He married his employer's daughters and got most of his property away from him. Always just inside the law, he was a schemer from the beginning, and his later reform is wholly the work of modern commentators.

But there is one story about him that seems to indicate a spiritual substratum to his character. It is the story of his wrestling. The story says he was wrestling with a man. But it was not an ordinary man. It was the same kind of man of whom Abraham entertained three under the oaks of Mamre — one of whom later proved to be Jehovah and the others two angels.

So Jacob and the other one, whatever the other one should be called, wrestled there — all night. And when the other saw that Jacob was too strong to be beaten by fair means, he threw Jacob's hip out of joint. Even then Jacob did not let go of him. "Let me go," said the other, "for the day breaketh." All spirits are supposed to vanish with the light. "I will not let you go," said Jacob, "till you bless me." Then the other asked Jacob his name — though he must have known that all the while. Jacob told him, and he said, "I will give you a better one." And Jacob indeed, before gods and men, had need of a better name. For his old one meant "Supplanter," "Over-reacher" — and he had lived up to it only too well. "Your name from now on," said the other, "shall be Israel," — that is, "One who strives with God." A much better name. For God will not strive with any mean antagonist, and it is a great spirit that can strive with him.

In turn it seems only fair to Jacob that the other shall tell him his name, and he asks for it. What difference did

it make to Jacob? Well, he naturally wanted to know with whom he was wrestling. Even in modern times a man's name is the simplest key to him. Sometimes you say to a man, "What is your name?" and sometimes you say, "Who are you?" It is the same thing. But in ancient times there was, as among primitive peoples there still is, a much closer connection between a man and his name than we assume. His name was part of him. To get his name was to get some hold upon him which one would not otherwise have. In Africa, or in a remote Chinese village, still, if you ask a man his name he will not tell you. It is his own business — part of him — why should he hand it over to you? You might do him some harm with it.

Now all this, which was true of men, was especially true of supernatural beings. They never revealed their names. At the burning bush Moses asks Jehovah for his name, but Jehovah, instead of saying, "I am Jehovah," said, evasively, "I am that I am." So it became a tradition among the Hebrews that nobody knew the true name of God; why should he give anybody the advantage over him which such knowledge implied? That is why Jesus, when he wanted to cast out a demon, always asked him his name first. If he knew that, he could deal better with him. But the stranger would not tell Jacob his name. He did bless him. Not willingly, it would appear. But it was getting near morning. Jacob, though crippled, was holding on. The stranger was apparently not sure he could win. It would be better to close with Jacob's implied promise, give him a blessing and get away before daylight. So he blessed him and disappeared.

Who Jacob thought he was is clear. For in the morning

he named that place "Peni-El" which means "face of God"; "for," said he, "I have seen God face to face." Then Jacob went on. But he was lame in his hip. The author adds that this is why the Hebrews do not eat a certain muscle in the thigh of any animal.

What actually happened to Jacob that night it is probably too late to find out. People have generally said that he had a dream. But a man does not usually throw his hip out of joint in a dream, or if he does it comes back when he wakes up. It is probably better to say that the story of what happened to him is one that grew up long after his time. And how it grew up is probably simple enough. Ancient people always explained things by a story. The regular formula was, "Once upon a time." This story attempts to explain three things: why the Hebrews discard a certain muscle in the meat they eat; why a certain place was called Peni-El; and how Jacob's name got changed to Israel. But the custom, or the name, is always older than the explanation for it, generally so old that nobody knows where it came from. So that for the same custom or name the Hebrews often had several different explanations. You are therefore at liberty to take the story, historically, for what it is worth.

But the historical truth of a story is one thing; the psychological truth of it is quite another. Ancient wisdom is mostly in the form of myths, legends, stories. And so it is here. Jacob wrestled with some power or person whose name and nature were unknown to him. And what he wanted was not merely to get a blessing from this unknown power or person, but to find out who and what it was.

Here is the psychological truth of this old story and its significance for all ages and generations of men. For what

Jacob did here is what all generations of serious men have been doing ever since, and are still doing. Behind and beneath all temporary problems that trouble us, far deeper and more insistent than any question of who shall be elected and what policies he shall pursue, or of when the depression will end, more searching than all the questions that science asks or answers, persisting through all revolutions that sweep over the world, oblivious of all distinctions of ancient or modern, Orient or Occident, lie the old questions, all reducible to one: What force lies back of all phenomena, what reality behind appearances?

That some power, or personality, or force, or intelligence, or wisdom — or however you may wish to call it — is there, few people have ever denied. But as to who or what it is, and what is the nature and the name of it, that is the question with which not only all theologians and philosophers, but all earnest and thoughtful men, whenever they can get away from the pressure of the passing hour, have always been wrestling.

And since it is the one great question, anything that raises it and presses it upon us is so far good. For what makes a man lame is not the wrestle with this question. The failure to wrestle with it, or even to recognize that it is there, is what makes a man go lame through life. Therefore I hail all agnosticism, materialism, mechanism, and even their milder-mannered cousin, humanism, because they throw us back upon the fundamental question.

I do not accept their answers. Agnosticism says: "We give it up. Something must be there; but what it is is too much for us. We never can know." Materialism says: "It is an unconscious force of some sort, a mill grinding away

forever, but neither caring or knowing what it grinds out." Humanism says: "Something or somebody may be there, but we have bothered ourselves too much about it already. What we want is to rely upon ourselves."

Each one of these "isms" is essentially a faith. Nobody pretends that they are proved or capable of proof. They are backed up by certain considerations, as all faiths are. But in their essence they are interpretations, ways of looking at the universe, reactions of the spirit to the sum total of reality — in a word, faiths. And since I also must have some interpretation, some reaction, some faith, and since these "isms" do not exhaust the list, I prefer a better one. Materialism or mechanism, of whatever sort, places at the center of the universe something less intelligent, less reasonable, less respectable, than even I am, and that doesn't seem to me reasonable. Agnosticism appears to me like either laziness or a confession of defeat; it is really the same answer that the Hindu sage long ago gave to a too persistent inquirer: "If you ask too many questions your head will fall off." Humanism attempts to waive the question. But it cannot be waived. When religion in England was almost as good as dead, and the Methodist revival broke out, rocking the souls of Englishmen like masts in a storm, Charles Wesley harked back to this old story about Jacob and wrote his great hymn, "Come, Thou great Traveler unknown, whom still I hold but cannot see." And so men will always cry out. Humanity is a great thing, and religion has generally undervalued it, and sometimes lied disgracefully about it. But I never have seen, and do not now see, anything about it that makes me feel like getting down on my knees to it. If humanism hopes to substitute it for God, it will have to wait till some

time when humanity has not recently behaved so like the beasts and is not floundering and wallowing as it still is today.

No, I do not accept any of these answers to the old and fundamental question. I have my own answer. It is what you would expect of me, to be sure. But it is what you may expect also from the deep and wise heart of mankind, after the fitful gusts of all smaller "isms" have blown themselves out. The power that lies behind things, the ultimate reality with which we come to grips in our imaginations and our ideals and our spiritual wrestlings, is like us — or like what we should like to be — wise where we are foolish, gentle where we are rough, kind where we are cruel, understanding where we are dumb. He is not someone who wants to wrestle with us, for he knows himself to be stronger than we are. Nor is he someone with whom we have to wrestle for his blessing, for that and that alone is what he wants to give us. He is like us, only infinitely wiser and better. You do not have to give this answer. For it, like all other answers, is also a faith. A faith backed up, indeed, by reason; but rising, like all great things, from something far deeper and more profound in the human soul than its mere power to argue. There are things that can be said against it. There are times when it looks too good to be true. That is why we still have to wrestle with it. But it is the answer in which all but a few of the greatest minds have found their satisfaction, and all the greatest souls have found their peace. I recommend it to you always. But I recommend it especially in a time of doubt, confusion and difficulty, like this. As Job, certainly no foolish or shallow man, said to his friends, arguing about the calamities of the hour: "Acquaint thyself with God and be at peace."

CHAPTER TWO

STORIES OF THE BEGINNINGS

FIRST among stories of the beginnings is of course the story — or rather, are the stories — of the creation. For several generations it has been recognized by biblical scholars that the Book of Genesis gives two accounts of the creation. The recognition of the existence of these two accounts has at least two consequences: it introduces us to the fact that the first part of the Book of Genesis was made by a combination of two sources, and so to a far-reaching revision of older ideas about this part of the Bible; and it shows that there is no one consistent biblical story to oppose to the more modern theories of the origin of man. Yet well known as this fact of the double account is among modern preachers, how many of the people have heard anything of it? And yet how easy it is to make it plain to anyone who will listen!

The King James Version obscured the difference between the two stories, partly by its translation and the arrangement of the verses of the second chapter of Genesis (this bad arrangement is unfortunately retained in the revised versions), and partly by its use of the word "Lord" for Jahweh, the word "Lord" still being used interchangeably with the word "God." If I have never used the two stories of creation as the basis for a sermon, that was only because I had already used them in adult Bible classes which were so large as to make the use of these stories in a sermon repetitious to

a considerable number of my hearers. I have often had in mind a picture of how I would do it in a sermon, and regretted that I had not saved such invaluable material for the larger use of Sunday morning.

Nothing, in fact, could be easier than the use of these stories in the pulpit. Any congregation is quite capable of following the distinctions upon which the stories are divided. They can appreciate the style of the first story, dry, repetitious, lawyer-like (in spite of a certain marked dignity); and they are easily able to contrast it with the vivid, picturesque, popular style of the second story. Equally plain — and I may add equally new to most congregations — are the facts that in the first story man comes last in the creation and in the second story he comes first; that the first story says “male and female created he them,” whereas the second story represents Adam as being alone, and lonesome. The sequel of the second story, the creation of Eve out of the side of Adam, constitutes the transition to the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man.

But more obvious, when it has once been pointed out, than any of these differences — except possibly the difference in the names for God — is the simple fact that the first story is wet and the second is dry. In the first story there is “water, water everywhere.” The first business of the Creator is to get some control of this water, to get “the waters that were above the firmament” separated from “the waters that were below the firmament,” and to get a little dry land on which to begin. The second story says quite as distinctly that the creation of man could not take place earlier because the ground was too dry. Not even Jahweh could make an image of a man out of dust that wouldn’t stick together.

"But there went up a mist from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground," and then Jahweh could begin. And he did begin, making a man as a potter forms a vessel of clay out of the moistened earth.

If one stops with the second story at this point, which is as far as the two stories have anything in common, why should he have preached about it at all, what has he accomplished in the education of his people by it, and what genuinely sermonic value is left to be enforced? As to what he has accomplished in the way of biblical education, I should say it was a lot. If he has carried his hearers with him — and it is his business to do it in such way that he will carry them — he has established the fact that the early part of the Book of Genesis, to go no further, was written neither by Moses nor by any other one man, but carries on its face the marks of a compilation. This he has done without any argument, without mentioning Moses, or without animadversion upon what he may consider an outgrown theory of biblical authorship. This portion of the Bible betrays in a perfectly manifest way its real literary character. Since this is precisely that portion of the Bible for which an infallible inspiration has most often been affirmed and over whose historicity the sternest battles have been waged, this carries with it some very far-reaching implications. The preacher may then proceed, if he wants to, to show how dignified and truly sublime and spiritual is the first biblical story of creation as compared with the stories of most ancient peoples. He may urge his hearers to toleration of modern theories of evolution. He may contrast the old idea of creation at a single stroke with the modern conception of creation still in process, and draw what spiritual lessons he will from the idea of an

imminent and ever active God. It is hard to see how he could do this last in any other way so well as by contrast with the idea of God involved in the biblical stories of creation. He may also show how here, at the very beginning of the Bible, is that phrase which is still the keynote of all idealistic philosophy: "In the beginning, God." At all events, his use of these stories will have communicated some long accumulated but hitherto unimparted items of biblical knowledge to his people, of a truly enlightening and liberating sort.

If the preacher — Oh, not the next Sunday; people must have time to recuperate; but after he has preached sufficiently about Hitler and Ethiopia — will take up the story of the Garden of Eden, beginning perhaps with the creation of Eve which belongs with it, he will find himself at once in the midst of the most interesting details. Not only are the creation of the animals, undertaken on Jahweh's part with the apparent hope of finding among them some fit helpmeet for the lonesome man, and the creation of Eve, and the astonishment and delight of Adam upon waking and seeing her there before him, all charming and delightful. But the story of the garden which follows this, while it disappears from the Bible between the Book of Genesis and the Epistle to the Romans, has had an almost incalculable influence upon Christian theology. Is anything easier to show to a congregation than the point that the author is not attempting to explain any such abstract and comparatively modern idea as "the origin of evil," but certain facts of nature and of human life which seem to him to be not as they should? Why do thorns and thistles grow without any help from man while corn and potatoes have to be planted and hoed?

Why, especially, since there is no other way of getting into the world except by being born, is this absolutely inescapable process so terribly hard and even dangerous? The author's answer, like the answer of all men who raised such questions in ancient times, is that originally it was not so. God did not intend it to be so. He meant this to be an easy and comfortable world. But the first people spoiled all this. So men in ancient times saved the face of God by taking the blame, not indeed upon themselves, but upon their long-gone ancestors. It is an ancient commentary upon the modern saying that Catholics confess their own sins but Protestants confess the sins of others.

Here also one comes to the fundamental idea of all religion, the idea of God. Whatever else one believes in the sphere of religion follows from that. Here in Eden one has a God who takes his walk in the garden in the cool of the day; who has forbidden Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of a certain tree and has threatened them, if they do, with consequences which he does not appear to have intended to carry out; who is surprised and indeed very angry at what has happened, and vents his wrath in cursing the snake, the man, the woman and the ground; and finally, who is so little of a God that he must turn the man and woman out of the garden lest they eat of the tree of life, become immortal, and so all distinction between God and man disappear. Here comes out, as only once elsewhere in the Old Testament, the idea which played so large a part in Greek religion, the idea of God as jealous of men and fearful of the progress they make in knowledge and wisdom. The central thing in progressive religion is a conception of God large, dignified and inclusive enough to meet religious needs and at the

same time not to be ashamed in the presence of modern scientific and philosophical ideas. The central thing in the Christian religion is a Christian conception of God. So long as we teach by contrast — and there is no better way of teaching — how can one better approach the modern and the truly Christian conception of God than by contrast with the conception implied in these ancient stories?

Of the long-lived worthies (Gen. 5) I have said as much as is necessary in my introductory chapter. There are, however, two other stories of the beginnings that are worthy of our notice; the stories of the flood (Gen. 6 to 8) and of the Tower of Babel. If we think people have quite ceased to believe in the flood as an actual historical occurrence we are much mistaken. Within the last fifteen years a supposedly learned gentleman with a foreign name lectured before one of the women's clubs in the town where I lived and announced that he had identified one of the Egyptian pyramids as the ark of Noah. Some of the ladies who reported the lecture to me were much impressed with this discovery, which indeed I was myself obliged to confess was of a somewhat startling character. But why should people know anything about the flood, since the ministers never say anything about it? And why shouldn't they believe in it, since there it is in the Bible? Yet nobody accepts the story of the flood without some misgivings. Something about it seems to be wrong, and not like the way in which God generally does things. Why then should not people know that practically all ancient peoples had their stories of a similar or comparable catastrophe, and that the Hebrew story seems to be an adaptation of a still more ancient one? If they have already learned to distinguish two stories of creation, why

can't they be encouraged to pick out the two stories of the flood? It is not so easy in this case as in the stories of creation, since here the author has woven his two sources together instead of putting them end to end. Yet the clues are simple. The two names for God, the forty days as against the year, the rain as against the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep, the two by two as against the seven by seven. It is an easier clue than people have to most of the acrostic puzzles they spend so much time in working, and the results are much more interesting and significant. What moral and spiritual lessons are to be drawn from this material this is not the place to stop to show; though in a world so nearly submerged as this one has been for the past fifteen years these would seem to be obvious enough. But at least the educative value, both as to the Bible itself and as to the ideas men have entertained of God and his doings in other days, is great.

I remarked that the idea of the envy of God comes out in one Old Testament passage besides the story of the Garden of Eden. The other passage, of course, is the story of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). The purpose of the story is to account for the existence of so many languages. Even now this difference of language is a barrier to communication and a cause of much instinctive prejudice and misunderstanding. To one unacquainted with the facts of the growth of races, peoples and groups in comparative isolation, or with the history of languages, it seemed a strange thing that so many peoples had forsaken the original language which Jahweh and Adam and Eve, and even the snake, spoke in the garden. This language was of course Hebrew. It is a superior language in many ways, even for those not born to it; its verb,

in particular, never ceasing to be a source of wonder to those who give it due consideration. And yet, here were many peoples that had forsaken it for languages which to the Hebrew sounded utterly uncouth and outlandish. Considering what he knew of the history of the human family and what he thought about Jahweh, the author's explanation is quite what would be expected of him.

Among beginnings also must be reckoned the account of the origin of the Jahweh worship. The story of this origin is spread over several chapters of the Book of Exodus, but comes to a climax, artistically, in the account of Moses' experience at the burning bush (Exod. 3). That the Jahweh worship among the Hebrews did originate, or did at least get itself confirmed and established, at the time of the Exodus seems historically assured. At all events it is the consistent theory of the document in which the story of the burning bush occurs. In that story there is one item which has served as a text for metaphysically minded preachers time out of mind. It is the verse in which, in reply to Moses' question about the name of the new God, the voice from the bush replies: "I am that I am." Nobody knows how many sermons have been drawn from this text — good sermons, too — on the eternity, the infinity, and the self-existence of God. The value of the text for this purpose is somewhat diminished in the Revised and other modern versions by the alternative readings given in the footnotes; "I am because I am"; "I am who I am"; "I will be what I will be." The voice adds, "Tell them 'I am' hath sent thee."

But certainly there never was a Hebrew God by the name of "I am." Nor did Moses say, when he got back to his people, "I am hath sent me." He said Jahweh had sent

him. It seems strange that it should have taken so long to discover that what we have here is a corruption of the text, and that in the original story Jahweh undoubtedly replied to Moses when asked for his name: "I am Jahweh. . . . Tell them Jahweh hath sent thee." That makes sense out of the passage; not a metaphysical sense that has to be dug out by theologians, but practical common sense, and a historical sense appropriate to the situation. There is every reason to assume that this is the way the passage originally ran. This becomes the more acceptable to people who hear of it for the first time, when it is observed that though the English words "I am that I am" cannot easily be derived from the English words "I am Jahweh," in Hebrew the change required is extremely slight.

Nor should one leave one's hearers with the impression that some scribe was so careless as to permit the change which has obviously occurred by mere mistake or oversight. With even a careless scribe this could hardly happen in such a passage as this. But as the idea developed among the Hebrews that it was not well to pronounce the real name of God (here the same idea of the significance of names appears as in the story of the wrestling of Jacob), it did not seem natural or proper that Jahweh should have revealed his own name so naïvely to Moses. If no modern reader is likely to be disturbed by the strange name which Jahweh is here made to give himself, that is either because he does not read the story at all, or because he passes over this item as something not meant for him to understand.

I have said in connection with other items that to take a passage which means nothing to people and to restore to it the meaning it once had and should still have, is in itself no

small thing to do. But in this instance it has the additional advantage of giving one a clear start on the historical origin of the Jahweh worship. It is a new idea to many people that religion has a real history, as other things have. To perceive that it has had such a history is to link it at once with the other interests of mankind and to relate it to the history of the race. Here again, what a preacher would work into a sermon on this passage depends entirely upon the preacher. Since this is a discussion of the use of the Bible in preaching and not a general homiletical treatise, it is not incumbent on me to go further into the matter. But surely it would suggest itself to any preacher that there are no new gods, but there are new names for God; that to give God a new name, as Jesus (probably without intending it) practically did, means that it is the business of those who follow him to help him live up to his new name by the things they believe concerning him and the way they behave in his service.

One might add to these stories of the beginnings the story of the beginnings of the chosen people. The story is perhaps spread over too many separated passages to make it easy to treat in this manner. Nor is it perhaps of enough interest or importance to warrant such treatment. Yet there is involved in it the whole idea of a chosen or favorite people. And who has not asked himself what business God ever had with a favorite people? There is in particular one chapter (Gen. 18) of this story, concerning the three men or angels, one of whom appears to have been Jahweh himself, who came walking across the field in which the tent of Abraham was pitched. Everybody knows that such things do not happen these days. Indeed most people suspect that people have never credited their occurrence in their own

times but only in some distant former age. But the picture of Jahweh's coming down to see whether things are really as bad in Sodom as they have been reported to him, and still more the highly Hebraic picture of Abraham jewing Jahweh down from fifty to ten, is both entertaining and instructive.

So much, however, for stories of the beginnings. As illustration of what one may naturally do with such material I venture to submit first a sermon on

THE FALL OF MAN

The charm of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden has been largely spoiled for us by two facts: we are so familiar with it that we can read it without seeing what is there; and the consequences of the conduct of our first parents have been considered so dreadful that it is no great pleasure for us to read about it. If your own father, or even your own great-grandfather, had done something that pretty nearly ruined you, your appreciation of the story of how he did it would be sunk in the wish that he hadn't done it. So with Adam. Until recently it has been assumed that he did do it precisely as is recorded of him. While the old idea of the Bible prevailed, there was, of course, no way to take the story except as actual history. I reckon it one of the great gains of the modern view of the Bible that we no longer have to take it so.

To see that the story is not real history, and that we have no reason to suppose the things recorded in it actually happened, requires no great erudition or long study. It is quite open to the comprehension of any of us.

To begin with the simplest item. The Bible puts the date

of Adam at about six thousand years ago. In your old Bibles the date 4004 B.C. used to be printed in the margin. This figure was computed by Archbishop Ussher three hundred years ago. But you don't have to depend upon him. You can do it for yourself. Start with the reign of David, somewhere around the year 1000 B.C. Then work back through the reign of Saul, the life of Samuel, the combined lives of the judges, and the period of the stay in Egypt; add up the ages of Jacob, Isaac, Abraham and the rest, back to Adam as these are given in the fifth chapter of Genesis, and you will come to something like the same figure. Or do it the other way round. Begin with Adam and how long he lived, his son and how long he lived, and so on down to the Exodus, and you will have it occurring some 2600 years after Adam was born. Then take the statement in the first Book of Kings, that Solomon built his temple 480 years after the Exodus, and add this 480 years to the 2600 years between Adam and the Exodus, and you get something like 3100 years from Adam to Solomon. Then if you know that Solomon began to reign about 950 B.C. you add 950 to 3100, and you get the creation of Adam about 4050 years before Christ. This is a good deal of arithmetic for one sermon. But if you have followed it you see how easy it is to figure out from the Bible itself that Adam began his career not more than six thousand years ago.

Now the verdict of modern science on the antiquity of man is not unanimous. But I suppose the geologists and anthropologists put it anywhere from 50,000 years up. If you take a much more modest figure, say 20,000 years, even then man had been on the earth some 14,000 years before the time of Adam. If you take the larger figures, say 200,000

or 250,000 years, Adam becomes by comparison a fairly modern man.

If you are skeptical of such estimates, there are other things much more certain and quite as much to the point. The Assyriologists agree that in the same part of the world where Adam is said to have been created six thousand years ago, at that time great cities, governments, arts and written languages were already flourishing. Civilization does not spring up in a night. Languages are a slow growth. Art is always long. If an inscription in the British Museum shows that more than six thousand years ago governments were in operation, commerce was well developed, a currency and a system of weights were in use, then the least you can say is that all these things got started thousands of years before the date of Adam. (Take your Wells' *Outline*, and figure back through the iron age, the bronze age, the new and the old stone ages, and it will all be clear to you.) But Adam is certainly represented in the Bible as the first man. And the conclusion is that Adam is not a historical figure, and that what he and his wife said to each other and to the snake, and what the three of them did in the Garden of Eden is no more historical.

The conclusion thus forced upon us is backed up by more general considerations, and by a closer look at the story itself. Who knows who the first man and woman were? Why nobody, of course. It's too long ago. When did the snake talk? And, if ever, what language did he speak? In this case, I suppose he talked Hebrew. But Hebrew belongs to a group of Semitic languages that took centuries to develop. Anybody who has studied the Hebrew verb will marvel how it was developed even in centuries. And he will

certainly wonder how not only Adam and Eve, but the serpent as well, knew how to use it the first day. If they all did speak it, who was there to report what they said? Nobody but Adam and Eve, of course. And if they acted as they are said to have done, who would believe them? Or how, if they did report what happened, could it be preserved from error for the three thousand years before it got written down in our Bible?

Or consider more carefully the story itself. God says to Adam and Eve, You must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if you do, you will die. The snake says to them, It is not so; God knows better. They try it. They do not die. On the contrary, as the serpent has said, their eyes are opened. They know what is good for them and what is bad. In other words, not what God had threatened, but what the serpent had said, proves to be true. Jehovah seems to live in the garden. Or, at least, he comes there for his afternoon walk. He suspects that something has gone wrong. He calls to the man, who has hid himself. He asks him what he has done. Adam, chivalrous man (a truly human touch), blames his wife. She blames the serpent. Jehovah is angry and relieves his feelings by a general curse. He curses the snake and says to him, You must crawl on your belly and eat dust, and every boy who sees you will stone you. He curses the woman, and says, You will want to be married, but you will find it a hard life; your husband will lord it over you, and you will have a terrible time bearing children. He curses the very ground, and says, let it bring forth thorns and thistles. And as for Adam, his life and that of his descendants will be one of hard work, hoeing and plowing and cultivating, much labor and

little reward, till he goes back to the dust from which he came. And then, most significant of all, he says, Because the man and his wife have got their eyes open and know what is good for them, now, for fear they will eat of the tree of life and live forever, I will turn them out of the garden — and he does. Now when did God act that way? When did he threaten men with something he knew wouldn't happen? And when, especially, was he ever jealous of men, and afraid they would become immortal like himself? Never, in my judgment; and I hope you agree with me.

If this old story then is not history, if these are not things that ever really happened, what sort of a story is it? It is a piece of what we call folklore. It is such a story as many ancient people used to tell about the beginnings of things. Or, better, it is a piece of early philosophizing. The author wishes to explain certain things. Some say he intended to teach certain spiritual lessons, as, say, man is part dust and part spirit, and so a being of two worlds; or man was not made to be idle, but to work; or man is possessed of a moral nature, and so on. But all these things seem to me to be too modern, too moral, too spiritual for the author to have been aiming at. Neither did he attempt to show how sin got started. Or if he intended to explain that, he didn't succeed. He shows indeed how a sinner may proceed, but not why or how a man becomes a sinner. No, the things he intended to explain were much simpler and more obvious and external than any of these things. Why does the snake go on his belly and eat dust — a thing that no creature would choose for himself, and that would seem too much for any Creator to put upon him? Why do thorns and thistles grow of themselves, while wheat and corn have to be planted and hoed?

Why does man have to work so terribly hard, just to keep down the weeds? Why do they not wait to be planted, and why do not the things he likes to eat grow of themselves? And most of all, why do women have such a hard time in life? Why are they beaten and shoved around by men? And why is not the supreme act of motherhood, upon which the perpetuation of the whole species depends, the inescapable lot of women, why is it not easy and simple and painless for them as it is for the rest of the animals? These are the questions that puzzled the early philosopher. And he answered them as well as he could. It was not, he says, originally so intended. Indeed, originally it was not so at all. It was just the opposite. Originally man lived an easy life, in a garden. The animals were all tame. The snake stood upright as he should. And all the man and his wife had to do was to pick the fruit and eat it. If the first man and woman had only behaved as they should have, it would all have gone on as it was at the start.

Now, if this is not historical; if things did not happen this way; if man, instead of beginning up high and then falling, began at the bottom and worked his way slowly up, what difference does it make? And why am I bothering you about it, when, if I would let you alone, you would just forget it?

I can tell you. It makes all the difference in the world. There are few points at which man's increasing knowledge does more to set his mind free from vicious ideas than just here.

In the first place, it makes all the difference in the world in our conception of man. Christian theology has thought meanly of human nature. If it has maintained that before

the Fall, Adam was well enough, it has held that since the Fall his descendants have been all wrong. Since then man has been a creature altogether vile. Or when not vile, then morally incapable. The old theologians identified the serpent with Satan. Milton popularized this conception in his *Paradise Lost*. Burns reflects it in his address to the Deil:

Lang syne in Eden's bonny yard,
When youthfu' lovers first were paired,
And all the joys of life they shared
 Afore the fa',
Then you, ye auld sneck-drawin' dog,
Ye came to Paradise incog,
An' gied the infant warld a shog,
 'Maist ruined a'.

The theologians pictured the rest of us as having been somehow in Adam; and it is not so long ago that all good Christian children were taught the doctrine of original sin; in the rhyme you can still read in the *New England Primer*, "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." Ideas take a long time to die. And though we do not believe we were in Adam, the old idea still lingers that what Adam did is a fair sample of human nature. But it is not. The sociologists teach us that there are two great formative influences in the lives of men, heredity and environment. If either of these is good — even if the other is bad — there is a chance for the man. He may come through if they are both bad. But if they are both good, the chances are ten to one that he will be a good man. The old story of the Garden of Eden teaches just the reverse. Adam's heredity and environment were both absolutely good. His father had never been in jail. His mother had never been a prostitute or a shoplifter. The burden of a bad

inheritance, which millions of men carry and thousands of them throw off, he did not have. His environment was equally good. He did not live in the slums. No bad boys taught him vile tricks and got his conscience twisted from the start. He was not hungry and therefore pushed to lie or steal. No competitors drove him to sharp practices. He came fresh from the hand of God; he lived in a garden where he had everything he needed. He had every incentive to do good. He had no temptation to do wrong. And in spite of all that, see what he did. Is that a picture of human nature? I say no — and again I hope you agree with me.

I believe the average member of this congregation and of the human race, if he had such a chance as Adam had, would have done better with it. We are accustomed to say that if you tear anything down you must put something better in its place. And in place of this old idea of human nature as inherently twisted and prone to evil, I put the conception of human nature as it is developed by our modern experience — as a thing capable of both evil and good, responsive to its environment, influenced by its heredity, but not capable, with both these and everything on its side, of going hopelessly wrong. Ideas die hard; and it may be a thousand years before we are rid of all remnants of this old and false idea of human nature. I do not know how much it will help, but I cannot refrain from throwing this stone at it.

And finally, I say, it makes all the difference in the world in our conception of God. Not that anybody these days thinks of God as walking in the garden and making clothes for men and women. But there is a hopeless idea of God still very much alive. There is the idea embodied in the doctrine of eternal punishment — the idea that God has

largely failed in his experiment with humanity, and has no better use for the great mass of it than to burn it up. It shows up in the doctrine of the Second Coming, whose plain implication is that the world is getting worse and worse, and that there is no hope for it except in a general smash. It is seen in the pessimism which, religious or irreligious, appeals to many men these days. "Our problems are too much for us," they say, "world forces are too vast, too far beyond our control; there is no outlook." And indeed, if it were true that the world almost got away from God before the end of the first week after he made it, the outlook would be bad. But beloved, it is not so. From the beginning it has never been so. As nearly as we can honestly tell, peering back through the mists of the past, computing the evils that have been laid aside, the superstitions outgrown, the cruelties conquered, the grossnesses dispelled, and weighing the present with all its evil and its good, God has been making his entrance into human life from the beginning, and pushing his blessed influence further and further out and deeper and deeper down into our life, reclaiming, refining, redeeming and remaking the world into a kingdom for himself. So it has been from the beginning. So it will be to the end.

As a second illustration, I present a sermon on

THE TOWER OF BABEL

In the eleventh chapter of the Book of Genesis is a story which you may not have read recently. I will read it to you, making a comment or two as I go along. It begins: "And the whole earth was of one language and one speech." That evidently represents a time which, in the author's mind, was

very near to the beginning. The story of the flood, to be sure, and of the rise of many nations just after it, has already been told. But the author of this story did not know that. He didn't put the Book of Genesis together. Somebody else did that, long afterwards. The story of the tower assumes that the human family is still living in "the east," probably near the Garden of Eden from which they have been driven.

"And as they journeyed from the east, they came to a plain in the land of Shinar [that is Babylonia], and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The tower was to be a landmark, like Radio Center in New York. Nothing is said about a light on top of it. But whoever wandered too far to the east of it, and lost his bearings, would see the tower standing out in splendor against the setting sun. And whoever got too far west, and had to spend the night upon the plain, would see the rising sun come up over it, and would know where he was and could find his way back. There were no offices in it. Nobody was supposed to live in it. Just a landmark, reaching to heaven.

But, says the story, "The Lord came down, to see the city and tower." The Lord is thought of as living up in heaven. All ancient peoples thought of him as living there. The heaven was not just air, as it is to us. It was a solid place, like the earth, not so very far above it. From there the Lord came down, upon occasion. He came down on the side of the mountain to talk with Moses. The elders of Israel went up there to see him. How he came down this time the story does not say. But he came down. And apparently he came

down because from up there he had seen what the men were doing, and he did not approve of it. When he got down to where he could see it better, he liked it still less.

"And the Lord said, The people are one; they have all one language; and this they begin to do." Or as we should say, "This is only the beginning; this is a sample of what they will do." "And now," he goes on, "nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do."

Then there is a little break in the story. Probably some words have fallen out. For the Lord says, "Let us go down and confound their language." But he was already down. In the story, originally, he must have been represented as going back after his first look at the tower. Going back, I suppose, to seek advice. To talk it over with the heavenly beings who surround him up in heaven like a court. Somebody is with him. Not other gods, for *he* is God. But lesser heavenly beings — angels, I suppose. This is the picture of him drawn in the opening of the Book of Job, where we read: "There came a day, when the Sons of God presented themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them." They are the persons, or the beings, to whom he says, "Let us make man in our image."

So he says: "Let us go down, and confound their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." And he did. For the story concludes: "So the Lord scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth; and they left off building the city."

The historical difficulties of the story are, of course, obvious. In the first place, it assumes a unity of the human race that, so far as we can tell, never existed. The author wishes to explain how there came to be so many different races of

men. And he says: "Originally it was not so. At first they all belonged to one nation. They were all one people. They worked together harmoniously. All the wars and plunderings that now happen between one nation and another were unknown; for they were all one." I can see why it appears to him that that would be a good arrangement. If Europe were not divided into Russians and Germans and French and Italians and Greeks and Turks, if all were one people, quarrels might still occur, civil wars might still break out; but the greatest single cause of jealousy and rivalry would be gone. Different peoples always have a hard time getting along with one another. It looks like a mistake to have so many races and nations. Well, says the author, the Lord didn't plan it so. He intended to have just one human family. And if they had not become so uppity, and thought they could build a tower that would reach up to heaven, they would still have been so. If there are too many nations, and if they push and jostle and fight one another, it is their own fault. The author is not only a historian telling a story, he is a theologian "justifying the ways of God to man." But so far as we can tell, there never was a time when the human race was one.

The same thing applies, of course, to the matter of language. I read the other day that there are over one hundred families of languages on the earth, no one of which appears to be derived from any other. Our natural assumption is that our own language is the natural language. All others seem strange to us. So the American soldier in France expressed his astonishment that even the children there spoke French. And the Scottish highlander, praying for victory and reminded that the British Tommy was doing the same,

comforted himself with the statement, "The Lord will never understand him." The Hebrews assumed that Hebrew was the original and divine language, the language that the Lord spoke and understood. The Egyptians thought the same about their language; the Chinese the same about theirs. In 1580 there appeared in Holland a learned book to prove that the original language was Dutch. A Swedish writer disputed the claim in favor of his own language. So far as we now know, there never was any one original language spoken by all men. Languages grew up in many places at many times, among many peoples or tribes who had no knowledge of one another. That's how they come to be so different.

But what a barrier this item of language is! Even we who speak one language and have always spoken it do not always make ourselves understood. You do not have to travel far in foreign lands to know how difficult it is to talk to someone who doesn't know a word of what you are saying. A man told me only the other day about how he once went to a remote village in Switzerland and asked an innkeeper the way to a certain convent. The innkeeper waved him to a seat and brought him a dinner. Stories of many travelers have made such little comedies familiar. But it is not only comedy that arises out of this difference in language. Tragedy grows out of it; quarrels, even wars. It is a barrier. A nuisance. How much better the world would get along if everybody talked the same language. Even here in America some people feel that we would be safer if everybody spoke English and nothing else. Well, says the author of our story, originally everybody did speak the same language. However, as I said, there doesn't seem to be any evidence

that it is so. All the evidence points in the opposite direction.

But great as are the historical difficulties with this story, the theological difficulties are greater still. For the author's implication is perfectly clear. Not only does the Lord live in the sky—we have all at one time thought of him as living there, and it hasn't done us any harm—but clearly, here, the Lord is jealous of men, of their power and their skill and their ambition. He is afraid they will build their tower to heaven, scale the celestial height, invade his own dwelling place. He must stop them. The strength of men lies in the fact that they are all one and speak the same language. So the Lord strikes at the root of the matter. He arranges things so that the hod carrier cannot understand the bricklayer, and when the latter orders brick he gets only mortar. The Lord's plan of attack is good. If you were erecting a building and none of your workmen understood one another, and none of them understood you, nor you them, you would probably quit. The plan was good. But the motive behind it was bad. The jealousy of the gods was a familiar idea among the Greeks, but the Hebrews were generally above it. Only here and in the story of the Garden of Eden does it come out. But it comes out clearly here. "This is only the beginning of what they will do," says the Lord. It goes back to a time when the Lord was thought of as only a little stronger and wiser than man. The singer is not jealous of someone who cannot sing at all. She is jealous of someone who can sing nearly as well as she. So it is of the Lord here. He is wiser and stronger than men. But he has to look out for himself. If things go on as they have been, he cannot tell what may happen. This, I say, is

the great difficulty with the story. For God was never jealous of men, never afraid they would climb to heaven. He never needed to undermine their efforts by some cunning device, and he never did — and a God who should need to do such things and should do them, would be, for us, no God at all.

In addition, therefore, to what I have said about this old story as I have gone along, I want now to say, first: unless I am utterly mistaken, there is a great advantage in recognizing such stories for what they are. And this is not merely an intellectual advantage, it is a moral and spiritual one. I listened the other evening to a concert by the Pomona Glee Club. They sang a song about Noah; about how the elephant said to him that there were snakes in his bed, and Noah accused the elephant of being drunk, and much else of the same sort that I do not remember, ending with the refrain, "Noah was the grand old man." All calculated to amuse, and at the expense of Noah. Now why should Noah be a joke? And why should we pious people who were there take no offense at the fun the college boys poked at him? Why, indeed, but that we half-consciously feel the inherent impossibility, almost the absurdity, even the ludicrous character of his exploit? But not on Sunday, of course; and not, generally, in the pulpit. Then and there we generally take all such things seriously. And that is how they have come to be so many jokes. Why is Jonah a joke? I cannot think of any reason except that we have so long insisted upon believing as actual historical fact what cannot be so believed.

Understand any of these old stories for what they are, and they become something vastly more than material for the humor of college glee clubs. The author of this story of the

Tower of Babel was a historical philosopher. He saw a great unfinished tower on the Babylonian plain, and he tried to explain it. He saw how many nations and peoples there were, and how many different languages they spoke, and how much trouble arose from this difference, and he tried to explain that. He used such historical knowledge and theological conceptions as were current in his time. That is all anybody can do. His explanation was probably as good for his time, as consistent with what was then known about the world, and as little offensive to the best spiritual sense that had then developed, as most modern philosophies — say the philosophy of Hegel or Herbert Spencer — and it lasted a good deal longer than either of them. When you so understand it, his work ceases to be something to laugh at and acquires a dignity of its own. He was a primitive thinker. But he was a thinker. If we had the whole of Hebrew literature, we should probably see how, upon such work as he and his successors did, the Hebrew prophets rose step by step to their sublime conception of God as he who inhabiteth eternity, and calleth the stars by their names, and weigheth the hills in scales and the dust in a balance. Whenever we understand one of these old stories we rescue some part of the Bible from oblivion or from ridicule.

Second: Unity is not a thing that is given at the start. It is an accomplishment, a thing to be won. It is so in your own life. Starting with a bundle of ideals, ambitions, purposes, the greater part of the business of life lies in getting yourself together, ruling out what does not belong, knocking off your excrescences, finding one path through the world and following it, and so becoming, in the end, one consistent and harmonious person. So it is with the world. It

did not begin with monotheism, but with a god of the spring and of the forest, a god of the hunt and of the battle, a god of heaven and a god of earth, and another god of the underworld. "Gods many and lords many," as Paul said. It has taken it thousands of years to arrive (and it has not even yet arrived, all around the world) at one God.

There was not in the beginning one human family, unified, harmonious, with perfect understanding. There will be, sometime, but it is not what we started with. It is what we are crawling toward, slowly and painfully. There will be, sometime, one language which all men everywhere will speak, till one may go around the world and hear his native tongue, and that old barrier to co-operation and mutual understanding will be gone. Give us a few thousand years more of steamships and railroads and telephones and radios and airplanes, and we will come to that. But we did not start with it. The unity that I seek in myself is not one that God could give me at the start. I have to win it for myself. The unity that we seek in the world is not one that it once had and then lost. It is the goal of our perpetual seeking.

But it will come. In our own souls, in our personal relations, and in the whole world, it will come. And the reason I believe it will come is not merely the progress that we have already manifestly made toward it. It is my confidence in God. For God is not here to thwart us, to be suspicious and jealous and afraid of our growing skill and knowledge, and therefore to confuse and scatter us. All that is precisely what he is not. It is the exact opposite of what he is. God is that infinite spirit that works from out eternity and in all time and place, to reconcile all things and persons to himself and therefore to each other. He is that infinite push

toward harmony and co-operation which has been working from the beginning of history in our human hearts. He is that infinite protest against strife and division and hatred, which has risen in the souls of good men in all generations, and which will forever rise in sterner but more loving remonstrance till strife and division and hatred are forever gone. As the great apostle said, "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." His hand is lifted not to smite and scatter but to beckon and to draw. How long and hard the road is, he knows; and even we begin to understand. But that there is no turning back from it, he knows; and we also should understand. The past is with the strivers, the dividers, the makers of confusion, the busy stirrers of the pot of hatred and bitterness and war. But the future is with the makers of understanding, the creators of good will and co-operation, because it is with God.

CHAPTER THREE

ANCIENT RELIGIOUS IDEAS

IN THE first chapter I referred to the blessing and the curse as having an independent power of their own after they have once passed the lips of the speaker. A similar sacredness was given to the oath, especially if it was made "before Jahweh," that is, in a sacred place. The best single instance is found in the case of Jephthah and his daughter (Judg. 11).

Whether any preacher cares to bring up such "old, unhappy far-off things" will be for him to decide. But Jephthah certainly made a rash vow, an extremely rash vow; for he must have known that what would come out to meet him from his own house when he returned victorious from battle would be some member of his own family. He made his vow as a bargain with Jahweh. Jahweh kept his part of the bargain; Jephthah was victorious. Now there was nothing for him to do but to keep his part. And the more's the pity, he did. He offered a human sacrifice, under compulsion of his vow. Not a sacrifice of someone who ought to have died, but of his own daughter.

How old, stretching away back to the beginnings, is this idea of sacrifice, and how much Christian theology, up until comparatively recent times, has been built upon it! Even now there lingers in the minds of most people the feeling that sacrifice was once, if it is no longer, a divine institution.

They think of it as resting upon the direct command of God, at least until it was supplanted or displaced by the sacrifice of Jesus. And the death of Jesus is still seen by most good people against this background. Why should people not know that sacrifice was not at all peculiar to the Hebrews but was universal in the ancient world, and that mingled everywhere with whatever divine elements there were in it there were also degrading and dehumanizing superstitions?

Here, then, is human sacrifice, not among the heathen but among the Hebrews and evidently considered by them to be pleasing to God. It was no accident that Jephthah made this sacrifice at this particular time. It was a critical moment for him and his people. And with the feeling which many people still entertain, that he would be more likely to secure the help of Jahweh if he promised to sacrifice the dearest thing he had, he made this vow without any illusion as to what it might involve. The King James Version of the Book of Judges rather hides this from the reader by making Jephthah vow to sacrifice to Jahweh "whatever" should come to meet him upon his return. The American revision substitutes "whoever" for "whatever" in a footnote. Professor Moore translates it "whoever," as does Dr. Meek in the "American Translation."

Jephthah certainly did not expect any inanimate thing to come out of his house to meet him. If he expected his dog or some other domestic animal there was no reason for his being so serious about it. Augustine suggests that perhaps he thought his wife would come out to meet him! Whether that would have suited him any better we do not know enough about the domestic affairs of Jephthah to say. It is hardly kind of Augustine to suggest it. But the story does

not mention Jephthah's wife; it only says he had no sons and this one daughter. It is therefore hardly possible to clear Jephthah from having intended his daughter as a sacrifice when he made his vow. When he was obliged to carry it out, there is no indication that his neighbors attempted to dissuade him from it. To them as to him it was an acceptable sacrifice to Jahweh.

If one goes back in the story of Jephthah to the time before the making of the vow (Judg. 11), he comes upon the argument of the Israelites with the Ammonites, in which the Israelites say: "Wilt thou not possess what Chemosh thy God giveth thee to possess? So whatsoever Jahweh our God hath dispossessed from before us, them will we possess." Jahweh is the god of the Israelites, Chemosh is the god of the Ammonites. Chemosh rules the Ammonites, Jahweh the Israelites. The Israelites will not dispute the verdict of Chemosh for Ammon; why should Ammon dispute the verdict of Jahweh for Israel? Here is the intermediate stage between polytheism and monotheism which Max Müller called henotheism, but which Professor Moore prefers to call monolatry. No tribe denied or doubted the existence of the gods of other tribes; it merely worshiped its own god and not the others.

But more significant than this is the character of Jahweh as revealed in the human sacrifice of Jephthah. The story is told with great skill, the tragedy neither minimized nor exaggerated. The dignity of the unnamed daughter, her acceptance of her unhappy fate, are worthy of the heroine of a Greek tragedy. But a greater tragedy than the fate of any one noble young woman is the fact that, with all the tragedy in life which cannot be escaped, such additional and avoid-

able tragedies as this should be drawn from the beliefs and practices of religion. A streak of inhumanity in religion crops out only too often. It appears not only in the Inquisition and the burning or hanging of witches and in persecution generally. It comes out whenever the verbal is exalted above the human, or the character of God is believed to be such that he is better pleased with blind obedience than with humane conduct.

Will anyone maintain that this streak of inhumanity has even now altogether disappeared from religion? It does not these days go to the length of putting people to death, but it often goes far toward making life unbearable. "After my long experience," says Edmund Gosse, toward the close of his moving book, *Father and Son*, "I have surely the right to protest against the untruth (would that I could apply to it any other word) that evangelical religion, or any religion in a violent form, is a wholesome or valuable or desirable adjunct to human life. It divides heart from heart. It sets up a vain, chimerical ideal in the barren pursuit of which all the tender indulgent affections, all the genial play of life, all the exquisite pleasures and soft resignations of the body, all that enlarges and calms the soul, are exchanged for what is harsh and void and negative. . . ."

"Any religion in a violent form," says Mr. Gosse. Jephthah was not necessarily himself a violent or cruel man. Both the Gosses, father and son, were mild-mannered patient men. But Jephthah had "religion in a violent form," as did the elder Mr. Gosse. Whether people who have it in that form can be persuaded to a more human type of it one cannot answer in any inclusive way. But people can certainly have their attention called to the fact that religion

does operate as a sweetener and ennobler of human life when it is of the right sort; and it leads to murder under the name of sacrifice when it is of the wrong sort. Both sorts are represented in the Bible, and the violent sort nowhere better than in the story of Jephthah and his daughter.

Jealousy is a human trait that has no time or country for its own. It is a black shadow that stalks forever in the light of love and turns the sweetest affection into the bitterest hatred. Sometime, perhaps, as the idea of proprietorship fades gradually from the marriage relation, we shall have love without even the danger of jealousy. Perhaps not. Anyway, the treatment of jealousy has improved, if but slowly, during the ages. In ancient times the woman owned but little, and never owned herself. As a child she belonged to her father; as a woman to her husband. She herself owned nobody; not even her husband. But he owned her.

In the Book of Numbers (Num. 5:11-31) is a most enlightening law for the treatment of a woman who was suspected of having been unfaithful to her marriage vow. There is no obverse law, of course, for the laws of the Old Testament were made as most laws have been, by the men. But if "the spirit of jealousy come upon" a man, he is to bring his wife to the priest, and make a "meal offering of jealousy"! Then follow minute directions as to what the priest is to do; to "set the woman before Jahweh," to let her hair down, to cause her to swear that she is innocent, then to write some dreadful curses in a book and "blot them out into the water of bitterness," and make the woman drink this water. If she is innocent it will not hurt her; but if she is guilty "her body shall swell and her thigh shall fall away; and the woman shall be a curse among her people."

Magic, done solemnly before Jahweh, with many a priestly word and genuflection, all in the interest of jealous husbands; for the law, or the author, adds, "And the man shall be free from iniquity"; no blame shall rest upon him whether he has suspected his wife rightly or wrongly; "the woman shall bear her iniquity." How this law worked in actual practice, or whether it was ever put into practice, we have no information. But it throws a lurid light upon the marital ideals of the time, all explicitly sanctioned in the name and by the practices of religion.

This item is perhaps too gruesome to form a fit subject for religious discourse. Women also appear to have been coming rapidly into their own in this matter of marital rights, especially the item of escaping from an unhappy marriage if they would. But this greater freedom for women in the dissolution of the marriage relation has had at every step to fight the opposition of religious authorities. Even now some branches of the Christian church maintain, in the face of the accumulated knowledge piled up by sociologists, that there is only one legitimate ground for divorce, that mentioned in the New Testament. One hesitates to ask — in fact one does not ask — whether these opponents of greater freedom for women stand somewhat on a par for our times with the priest who in the olden time piously administered "the water of bitterness." One does not ask it, as I said. But the question suggests itself.

One feels almost like apologizing for calling attention to such things in the Bible at a time when most people would of themselves not so much as discover that they are there. But this is a book that has to do with a certain kind of biblical preaching. Having said that the modern point of view

brings within the homiletic field a vast amount of material which was in earlier times unavailable, I have taken this somewhat extreme, or even *outré*, passage as an illustration. More usable material abounds, happily, and of some of this I shall speak. But any material which brings vividly to people's minds the stages through which religion and ethics have moved is usable and valuable.

There is, for a further instance, the law concerning the undiscovered murderer (Deut. 21:1-9). The law runs to the effect that if a man is found murdered, in a field, and there is no evidence to indicate the murderer, the elders are to measure from the dead body to the various "cities" about, and find out which one lies nearest. The elders of that city shall take a heifer that has never been yoked, shall take her down into a valley where there is running water, the valley being one that has neither been plowed nor sown, and shall break her neck. The elders shall declare that they know nothing about the murder, and shall wash their hands over the heifer, and shall pray, "Forgive, O Jahweh, thy people Israel, and suffer not innocent blood to remain in the midst of thy people Israel. . . ." The author adds, "So shalt thou put away the innocent blood from the midst of thee."

The first thing one notices about this law is that it is supposed to go back to Moses and the period of the wilderness. All ancient peoples represented their laws as coming from the god or gods. It was the ancient equivalent of our way of feeling that justice is a divine interest, not merely a human invention. The idea that the sovereign is himself divinely descended is a variation upon the same theme. So the Hebrews referred all their laws back to Moses, and

through him to Jahweh when he and Moses met on the sacred mountain.

But everybody knows that laws do not grow up this way. They are not made in advance. They are the result of experience, the solidification or the sanction of accredited custom. If one should discover a copy of the laws drawn up by William Penn for his colony in America, and should find one law saying, "It is unlawful to park within fifteen feet of a water plug," he would suspect that something had crept into this code that was later than William Penn himself. But one will read these Hebrew laws supposed to have been drawn up in the wilderness and find among them laws relating to cities that did not yet exist and would not exist for several centuries, and he will suspect nothing. But surely people are capable of seeing simple points like this when they are duly pointed out; and the perception of them throws a flood of light upon the Old Testament.

After this more general consideration, coming to the details of the passage one finds in this story the dawning sense of social responsibility. Somebody had committed this murder. Somebody must do something about it. If they could not find the real murderer, they would not just report it on the front page for one day and then forget all about it, as we do. They would at least recognize that human life is sacred; that irrespective of who either the murderer or the victim was, a life should not be wiped out without some decent and public recognition of what had occurred.

Back of this are a half-dozen ancient religious ideas. There is the idea that a heifer that has not been used is better for such a purpose than one that has been, and that the ceremony is also more efficacious if it takes place in a

field that has not been plowed. These items remind one of the law that if an altar is made of stone it must be of uncut stone. All this seems akin to or part of the more general idea that God is nearer to nature as nature originally was than as she has been made over by man. Some such conception probably lay back of the statement that God was pleased with the sacrifice of Abel but not with that of Cain. Abel was a keeper of sheep, Cain a tiller of the ground. What Abel brought seemed to have grown without his intervention, and was nearer to nature. What Cain brought was only partly from nature and partly from his own labor and intervention. It lies back of the idea that persists throughout the Old Testament, that civilization represents a decline from a state which was better because more natural; as when Lot asks Jahweh if he may not go to the city of Zoar, adding, "It is but a little one." It explains the habits of the Rechabites and has been in all ages, though perhaps more or less unconsciously, at the basis of ascetic practice. Anyway, the heifer must not have been yoked, the field not have been plowed.

Here also is the old idea not yet everywhere outgrown, that there is an exact way of doing things to make them efficacious with God. So the child still feels that the prayer will not be so acceptable if the hands have not been folded or if the eyes have unintentionally come open in the process. The washing of the hands over the heifer may be a symbolical transfer of the responsibility for the evil deed. The breaking of the heifer's neck may be in imitation of the hanging of the murderer if he could be found.

The whole thing is close to magic, of course. There is the idea of innocent, or unrevenged blood as "polluting"

the land in which it has been shed. Back of this is the idea of the land itself as belonging to Jahweh; it is his "inheritance." But running in and out among these ancient and outgrown conceptions there is the question, still with us and growing more tangled and difficult every day, of social responsibility and personal responsibility and the relation between the two. Here are some of the tentative beginnings of that long experiment in the treatment of crime which cannot by any means be said to have been solved by most modern communities. If we had ten times the running brooks and unused fields and heifers that we have, we should have exhausted them all before we should have wiped out in this way all the innocent blood that has been shed by undiscovered murderers in the United States.

Here is the idea, neither ancient nor modern but eternally true, that there is such a thing as justice, abstract justice if you will; that this justice is the care not only of magistrates and elders but of whatever powers there be that rule this world of ours; that whoever has rashly violated the sacredness of human life has left a stain upon the earth; and that if such innocent blood be allowed to accumulate, and men do not do the best they know about it, terrible consequences are sure to follow. Some divine principle does seem to require justice, not in a bloodthirsty way, but in the interest of human life. This justice may be foolishly administered; sometimes it seems as if our total treatment of crime from the beginning up to now has been about as wise and efficacious as this performance of the elders in the valley.

In the olden time it was simpler and easier, being an affair between the tribe and its God. If the right man could not be found, the right ceremony could at least be performed

before the God. But I do not know why a minister whose interests extend beyond the realm of merely personal religion should not preach now and then on the subject of crime and its treatment. I hardly know any subject that more needs preaching about, our criminal law and its administration being, as has often been declared by men in high legal positions, a disgrace and a failure, and our treatment of criminals being too often brutal and dehumanizing in the extreme. If one is to preach about crime and its punishment, he may start from many places in the Bible — or if he prefers, without any reference to the Bible at all. But I do not know where he can start from, to make the incidental features of his sermon both interesting and educative, better than from this old law in Deuteronomy.

A little story illustrating several ancient ideas is the one about David in exile, in the twenty-sixth chapter of First Samuel. Saul has been hidden in a cave. David has crept into the cave and come upon him asleep. Abishai, who is with David, thinks it would be wise to kill Saul and have the civil war over at once. But David will not countenance so impious a deed. Saul is to him, although his bitter enemy, still "the anointed of Jahweh." So David takes the cruse of water that stands ready for Saul to drink from when he awakes, and the spear that is planted into the ground near Saul's head, and carries them off. When Saul awakes, David holds a parley with him. To prove both his own superior prowess and magnanimity he displays the spear and the cruse to Saul. David wishes to excuse Saul for his unwarranted enmity, and suggests that perhaps Jahweh has stirred up Saul against him. Here is the old idea so frequently met with in the Old Testament, that not only good thoughts and

generous purposes, but upon occasion sentiments of quite the reverse nature come from Jahweh. The origin, I suppose, of such an idea, was merely the tendency that has always prevailed to refer to the divine agency things that do not seem explicable by human motives. Perhaps a growing sense of the power of Jahweh, such as comes to its full in Jeremiah's statement, "I am Jahweh; I form the good and create the evil," may have been working in men's minds in this earlier time.

David seems rather to hope that it may be Jahweh who has stirred up Saul, for in that case he will know what to do about it: "Let him smell an offering," he says. If Saul has been put up to his persecution by other men, David does not so clearly see a way to remedy it. He can only say of them, "Cursed be they before Jahweh." The stateliness of the biblical words partly conceal the similarity of this sentence of David's to the words frequently used these days by profane men who wish their enemies the worst. There was no such thing, apparently, among the Hebrews, as what we call "profanity." But David's words amount to a wish too often expressed by modern profane men in three short words that need not be quoted. The important thing here, however, is that David thinks that perhaps Saul's wrath may be inspired by Jahweh; and if it is, he knows what to do about it.

David goes on to elaborate what his enemies have done to him. They have driven him out, he says, that he "should not cleave to the inheritance of Jahweh." That is, of course, to Jewish soil. But this carries with it a further bitterness. "They have driven me out," says David, "saying, go serve other gods." Exile is a bitter thing at any time. But the solace of the modern exile is that, if he will, he can take his

god with him. The bitterness of exile in David's time was that he left behind him not only his home and family but his god as well. Many an exile of other times has found a precious resource in his religion; but David is robbed of that also. For the god can be served only on his own land.

So Naaman the Syrian (II Kings 5:17), cured of his leprosy by the prophet of Jahweh and professing himself converted to the Jahweh religion, begs to be permitted to take home with him two mule-loads of Jewish earth. On this, when he gets home, he can erect an altar to Jahweh. A sort of legal fiction I suppose it would be called; but it reveals equally with this story about David the old idea of the connection between the god and the land. This idea David makes still more explicit by pleading with Saul that he may be allowed to come home, adding "let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of Jahweh." He is nineteen or twenty miles from home. But the jurisdiction of Jahweh does not extend that far.

In many respects David was not an admirable man. The idea that he was perfect before Jahweh grew up in later times, perhaps by contrast of his character with that of so many of his successors. But whatever else David was, he was pious. It is not the danger of his wandering life that troubles him. It is not primarily the thought of his loved ones at home. What distresses him, and rises instinctively to utterance upon his lips, is the fear that he may have to live and die without God. It is a tremendous advance from this old conception of God to our conception of him as Lord of the whole earth and present everywhere to every humble and contrite heart—a conception partly dimmed by the fact that so many men are content to forget all about God

even when they are at home. But ancient religious ideas, to be used not merely by way of education but full of moral and spiritual teachings by way of contrast, are here in a rich vein.

A similarly rich and much more pathetic instance is the case of the famine that occurred after David had come to the throne (II Sam. 21). David "sought the face of Jahweh" for an explanation of the famine and Jahweh said, "It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put to death the Gibeonites." With this conviction in his mind, David called representatives of the Gibeonites before him and asked what he should do. Money they would not take. Neither was it for them, they said, to put any Israelite to death. Then David asked them what they would be satisfied with, and promised to give it to them. They asked for the seven sons of Saul, to "hang them up unto Jahweh in Gibeah." They were not merely to be hanged; they were to be hanged "before Jahweh."

David gave them up: two sons of Saul by his concubine Rizpah and five sons of Saul's daughter Michal who had once been David's own wife. One cannot suppose that he did this willingly. He had promised; he also doubtless felt that this retribution, brutal as it was, might wipe out the innocent blood that defiled the land. He gave them up, and the Gibeonites "hanged them in the mountain before Jahweh." It was at the beginning of barley harvest — hot, therefore, with a scorching sun. But Rizpah, the mother of two of the seven that were hanged, "took sackcloth and spread it for her on the rock, and from the beginning of barley harvest until water was poured upon them from heaven, she suffered neither the birds of the heaven to rest upon them by day nor the beasts of the field by night." Few

more telling instances of mother love are anywhere recorded in literature. When David heard of what Rizpah had done, he made what amends he could. The story ends with the statement that "after that, God was entreated for the land. . . ."

Here are, with a vengeance, old ideas of the possible causes of famine, of retribution, and as always behind all other old ideas, an ancient conception of God. Much ancient literature, especially the Greek, where it deals with scenes of pathos, has a restraint that heightens the effect at the same time that it softens the shock of the incidents. So it is here. Something like fifty years ago I heard a sermon from this old story of Rizpah, retaining from it only the memory of the pathos of the story; that and the fact that a woman of the congregation came to the preacher and wanted to know where she could find the story for herself, never having heard of it before. He would be a bold man who should maintain that popular familiarity with the Bible has increased since those days.

Among ancient religious ideas is one that has persisted down to the present and that emerges with all its old-time vigor in all cases of national crises. It is the old idea that the Lord has *us* in his peculiar care and keeping; that he thinks more of us than of some other people; and that, especially, he is on our side in any difficulty we have with other nations and peoples. This idea comes to strident and obnoxious expression in times of war, but even in times of peace it slumbers just below the surface of the general consciousness. We father our own hatreds off onto the Almighty. It gives us reassurance. If we can find them registered with the Infinite we can't be mistaken about them ourselves. We

could hardly go to war if we did not feel that God was with us. The ease with which each nation persuades itself that God is with it and not with its enemies presents a phenomenon which comes up for perpetual explanation. How much of our own national bumptiousness rests back upon the unexamined assumption that God is always with us?

There was a logical justification for this feeling in ancient times. Because then each people had its own god. Its own god, naturally, could not be with or for any other nation or people, since each of the others had its own god to be on its own side. I do not know whether people can be made to see that this feeling of ours is a lineal descendant of this old monolatrous conception of the gods. That may be too scholastic an approach to the subject to be made part of the popular understanding. And it might not make any difference anyhow. And yet it is certainly worth trying. National passions and prejudices, once in full swing, are not to be halted or turned aside by logical considerations. But people may be rendered less liable to such passions and prejudices by some deliberate thinking in times when passions are asleep. At least some members of any intelligent congregation might be made to see that apart from their inherent unreasonableness our assumptions of the divine favor in our behalf take on an additional absurdity from the fact that they are mere carry-overs from an early and particularistic time when they were more or less justified, into a time when this justification for them is entirely lacking.

However this may be, one of the finest examples of the fathering-off upon God of human hatreds and prejudices is to be found in the passage in I Samuel 15:1-3. Samuel came to Saul with a "word of Jahweh." It is not the kind of

word we should expect from the Lord today. It is, in fact, about as good an example as can anywhere be found, of a word which a man has himself put into the mouth of God. Whoever knows Samuel, and remembers how "he hewed Agag in pieces before Jahweh in Gilgal," will recognize the real authorship of the message. But Samuel said: "Thus saith Jahweh; I remember what Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."

What Amalek did to Israel on the way up from Egypt, and what Joshua did to him in return, is told in the Book of Exodus, where it is reported that "Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." It would seem that it was hardly necessary to do anything more about it. But Samuel, or rather Jahweh according to Samuel, thought it was. Israel came out of Egypt somewhere around 1250 and Saul did not become king till 1030. A period of more than two hundred years had therefore elapsed. Nobody was alive, or had been for a hundred and fifty years, who had had any part in the original quarrel. But Jahweh, according to Samuel, still held a grudge against Amalek.

Either God still holds a grudge for a couple of hundred years or he does not. If he does, that is too bad, and it does not seem as if he ought to. But if he does not, then he has improved since Samuel's time. And if he has improved since that time then it would seem that at that time he was not as good as he should have been. Is it not simpler to admit that in biblical times, as in all others, people had to

make up their own minds what they would think about God, and that, as people still do today when they are in anger or give their ultranational prejudices full sway, they too often believed that God thought whatever they thought? What one does with a passage of this sort on the older theory of biblical infallibility, I do not know. But what a modern preacher can do with it — and I do not know how he can do it better starting from any other point of departure — is to show the transformation that has come over the conception of God, and how that transformation has not yet gone as far as it should.

There is another passage, in Leviticus 16 (who goes to Leviticus for a sermon these days?), which comes near to representing in a unique degree certain ancient religious ideas, the most prominent of which has played a large part in Christian theology and still hangs, consciously or otherwise, in the background of the popular mind. The law here quoted used to be called that of the “scapegoat.” I imagine the good word “scapegoat” came originally from this passage. But it could not be drawn from the revised versions, for there, instead of the familiar scapegoat, appears what looks at once like a proper name — Azazel. My attention was first vividly called to this change in the translation upon hearing this passage expounded in a Sunday school lesson at a summer assembly. A member of the class asked the teacher, “Who was Azazel?” The teacher hesitated a moment as if this had not occurred to him before, and replied, “I suppose that was the name of one of the goats.” The class, not being of a critical mind, let the explanation pass. One godless man in the class (a minister) said afterwards that he had had a notion to ask the teacher if Jahweh was

the name of the other goat; but at the time he said nothing, as did the rest of us.

But what we have in the passage is clear. The sins of the people are to be loaded on the head of one of the goats which is to be sent off into the wilderness to Azazel. Azazel is probably a survival of primitive Semitic demonology, appearing here only in the Old Testament. As the one goat was to be sacrificed before Jahweh, so the other was to be sent out into the wilderness to his own master.

Earlier in the passage are remnants of other ancient religious ideas, particularly the ancient idea of holiness. For holiness had not with primitive peoples its modern moral and spiritual connotation. It was a mysterious divine quality that inhered in certain places and objects, and that, if not approached with proper precautions, was dangerous in the extreme. I hazard a guess (probably wrong) that this may have been the origin of ecclesiastical clothes. We wear them these days for dignity, but in older times the priest wore them for safety. Holiness was something like electricity, not well understood, sometimes capricious in its operations, and not therefore to be handled without due protection. Aaron is not to come into the holy place at all times, "lest he die." But when he does come he is to come properly attired in "the holy linen coat, and . . . linen breeches upon his flesh, girded with the linen girdle." So attired he may safely approach. In a similar vein, the priest was to wear bells on his mitre (Exod. 28:33-35) to jingle before he entered the holy place, in order to give notice of his approach and thus make it safe for him. It was this sort of holiness that issued from the ark and slew Uzzah (II Sam. 6:7) when he touched it to keep it from falling off the cart.

In the instance under consideration, even when Aaron is properly attired, Jahweh will hide himself in the smoke of the incense; for it was a proverb among the Israelites that no man might see God and live. In one of the traditions of the Exodus it is said that the elders of Israel did see Jahweh "and did eat and drink" — i.e. did not die, in spite of the proverb and the general expectation. In some quarters it seems, therefore, to have been held that Jahweh might actually be seen, though it was not safe to look upon him. According to the other tradition, even Moses did not actually see the face of Jahweh in the mountain, but only his retreating form as he passed by the cleft in the rock. At the burning bush Jahweh instructs Moses to remove his shoes — the idea perhaps being that as the ground was holy the shoes would be ruined for ordinary purposes by treading upon it. But in the instance of Aaron and his preparation for the remission of the sins of the people, Aaron protects himself by wearing the holy garments. The transformation of holiness from a half magic and non-spiritual quality that inheres in sacred places and objects and that may break forth upon even a well-intentioned man if he is not protected against it, to a spiritual trait in human hearts is one of the most significant transformations in the history of religion.

More important in this passage, however, and more distinctive of it, is the idea that sins can be transferred, placed on the head of some creature and borne off into the wilderness so that the perpetrators of them may be once and for all rid of them. The people must also repent and confess. But the essential element of the ceremony is the loading of the sins on the goat and the sending of him away. This idea

of the transferability of sins was widespread in the ancient world. The Babylonians had a rite quite similar to this described in Exodus. The Greeks put the sins of the people on the pharmakos and then put him to death. But what is important to observe is how this old idea long survived in Christendom in certain theories of the atonement; or at least how these theories could never have arisen except for the idea of the transferability of guilt from one person to another. It is worth noting also that the performance by which the Israelites got rid of their accumulated sins was almost wholly ritualistic. The right garments, the right words, the placing of the sins and the releasing of the goat, all must be just so or the sins will not be dismissed.

I have remarked more than once that the central idea in religion is the idea of God. What does he want — ritual or righteousness, ceremony or an inward purification? Here we come again upon the everlasting conflict between the religion of the priest and the religion of the prophet. Micah's words haunt the memory: "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" Nothing, to be sure; but we are still slow in learning it. And any preacher who wants to preach about God — and most preachers say quite too little about him — and incidentally to protest against undue and unwholesome survivals in religion, may find a suitable starting place in this old story. If in addition he hopes to educate his people with regard to the biblical literature and the spiritual history embedded in it he can turn this passage to obvious account.

As an illustration of the possible use of passages dealing with an idea which played a primary role in Israelitish re-

ligion, and left its heritage to Christianity, I select one which also gives occasion for the use of some of the simpler methods and results of the higher criticism. I base it upon some excerpts from the first few verses of the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, and call it

A PREMATURE MESSIAH

Thus saith Jehovah to Cyrus, his anointed, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings to open the gates before him; I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me, and I have girded thee, though thou knewest me not.

“Thus saith Jehovah to his anointed, to Cyrus.” Now that is a surprising thing; for this is in the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah lived in the eighth century B.C. In the introduction to this book the names of the kings under whom he prophesied are given, and there is no more doubt about when he lived than there is about when Savonarola or John Wesley lived. But this passage in his book refers to Cyrus.

In 550 Cyrus was king of a little province in Persia. He rallied the Persians in a revolt against the Medes. He conquered Croesus, King of Lydia. In 539 he took Babylon and founded the Persian Empire. For Isaiah who lived in the eighth century B.C. to mention Cyrus who lived in the sixth century would be like Benjamin Franklin criticizing Herbert Hoover or William Pitt complaining about Mussolini. The man who wrote this lived in the time of Cyrus, probably in Babylon, not in Jerusalem in the time of Isaiah. And this man hailed Cyrus as a messiah — for that is what the word anointed means; Messiah and Christ mean the same thing, one is Hebrew and the other is Greek. In the Greek version

of the Old Testament this passage reads, "Thus saith Jehovah to his Christ, to Cyrus." Much meaning undoubtedly was added to the word messiah, between the time of Cyrus and the time of Jesus. But the writer of the passage under discussion regarded Cyrus as in some sense a messiah, since he calls him that.

But why should a Hebrew hail Cyrus, King of Persia, as a messiah? Because Cyrus had conquered the King of Babylon. And there were many Jews in Babylon, carried there by the King of Babylon when he sacked Jerusalem in 586. They had been there for fifty years when Cyrus arrived. "By the waters of Babylon," a later poet wrote, "by the rivers of Babylon we sat down, yea we wept when we remembered Zion; we hung our harps upon the willows; if I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." Now Cyrus had taken Babylon and the Jews would almost have called him a messiah just for that. But he added one more and greater kindness to them; he said, Now you can go home if you want to.

And he added yet another thing. These Jews, compelled for fifty years to worship Marduk in whom they did not believe, or to worship Jehovah amid the sneers of the Babylonians, these Jews to whom the people around them had said, as if it were a good joke, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion," but who could not sing their old songs in a foreign land and who hung their harps on the willows, evidently appealed to Cyrus, and he told them to go home and build again the city and the temple the Babylonians had destroyed, and he gave them money and royal protection to help them.

No wonder this writer, himself an exile in Babylon, speak-

ing the gratitude of his own heart and of the Jewish community there, hailed Cyrus as a messiah.

But Cyrus was a Parsi, a good Persian. He followed Zoroaster and worshiped Ahura Mazda. He was not a worshiper of Jehovah. But, says the writer, in spite of that, Jehovah chose Cyrus, appointed him, girded him, named him, anointed him as his messiah to do his work; "I have raised him up," he says, "he shall build my city, and he shall let my captives go. He is my shepherd, saying of Jerusalem, let it be built, and of the temple, let the foundations be laid."

So then, here was this heathen king who knew nothing about Jehovah. And here was Jehovah entirely ignoring that fact and saying to him, You are my servant just the same.

But can a man really serve God, who doesn't intend to, doesn't even recognize him but goes his own way seeking only his own purposes? I hope so, and if so, there is some hope for both God and for the world. For there are many such people in it. And if God had to depend for getting his will done on those who stop and ask: What *is* the will of God, and then proceed to do that and nothing else, the outlook for ever getting it done would not be good. For there are not now, and there never have been, more than a handful of people who do that. And if most people never stop to do that, and if some of those who do are sometimes mistaken about it, then how will God ever get his will done, if he has to rely on these? But *if* the purpose of God gets itself realized not merely through the few of us who think we are doing it, but through many who never stop to think of it at all, and even through those who do their best not to do it, why then, in the end, it will be done.

Now just that, as a matter of fact, is one thing we mean when we say we believe in God. We mean that there is an order, or a system, or a principle (call it what you will) in the world, which utilizes not only the well-designed and good intentions of men, but their thoughtless actions and even their godless purposes for the accomplishment of an end beyond their comprehension or intent.

Now this is surely so. Take it in things that are morally indifferent, neither good nor bad in themselves. We do them without any reference to the will of God. But they work into a purpose larger than our own. A man seeks knowledge, not with reference to any far-off or high-minded end; not because it will further any divine purpose, nor because it will benefit mankind; not to contribute to generations to come, but just to gratify his own curiosity, and because he personally wants to know. But he cannot keep his knowledge to himself. Without any reference to what he wants it for, it becomes a benefit to mankind. Whether he meant it so or not, it is a gift to coming generations. He makes an invention, and to save the profits of it to himself he gets a patent on it. But a dozen or a hundred other men, even while the patent holds, see what he has done and do the same thing in some other way. So the thing goes to the public. He writes a poem or a symphony, just to satisfy a purely private and personal impulse. But the good of it reaches everybody.

It is still more obviously true of things that are morally good. If you live a good life and do not stop to say to yourself, "I do this to further the divine purpose," but just do it because you are that kind of a man and nothing else will satisfy you personally, it is your contribution to the divine purpose just the same; and God who watches you do it can

say of you as he said of Cyrus, "I girded him, though he knew me not."

And it is even true of many things that are bad. African slavery was a curse. But it introduced a great section of the African race to civilization, and the results of that initiation will sooner or later reach every black man in the world. The present regime in Russia rests on despotism and cruelty. But if it makes the whole world think about things which the whole world has long known were there but has refused to think about, it may bring a juster human society all around the world. The World War was the greatest single international crime in the history of the human race so far. But it may prove to have been the gigantic slap in the face of mankind that will bring it to its senses and will ultimately bring an era of world peace and a world civilization. Within the shadow, as the nations were busy at their orgy of bitterness and butchery, there may have lurked a spirit saying, "I called them, even though they knew me not." As the psalmist said, "He causeth the wrath of men to praise him." Or as Isaiah said, "Assyria is the rod of mine anger, and the staff in his hand is my indignation. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so." In other words, "He doesn't know it, but even he is doing my will."

Now do not say, "Then the old distinction between good and bad disappears." Not at all. The good is still good. The evil is still evil. But out of the evil, good comes. And do not say, "Well, then it makes no difference whether we do evil or good, since, either way, the will of God gets ahead." It gets ahead faster if you do the right and not the wrong. And haven't we seen enough of the sorrow and the pain in the process of getting good out of evil, even though that can

be done? Why should we do it in that terrible way instead of simply doing the good?

And do not say, finally: "I need not stop to consider whether I am doing the will of God, since one way or the other I am doing it anyhow." For this is just the supreme dignity and glory of our human kind, that we can know that we are doing it. We can bring the good we can do, the wrong we can banish, the pity we can engender, the love we can give and evoke, and we can say, "Here is our contribution to the divine purpose." And if you can do that; if you can say to yourself, "This that I do is not my doing alone, it is the doing of the Almighty in me, I do it as a part of a divine purpose" — then I'll tell you what that will do for you. No matter of what trivial things your life is made up, you will know yourself for someone of importance in this great universe. A new significance will come into your commonest deeds and thoughts when you are a partner in the divine enterprise. Now try it.

CHAPTER FOUR

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

I HAVE already said that I introduce certain material under this heading not because it could not be used to illustrate ancient religious ideas or other items but because the item of human interest stands out pre-eminently in it. One reason for preaching out of the Bible is to show how human a book it is. The Old Testament in particular is a mine for human interest stories.

If most of those which I cite in this chapter come from the period of David, that is because there gathered around the figure of this greatest of Israelite kings an unusual fund of personal anecdotes. This, I suppose, was not merely because David filled the public eye as no other king did but because the writing of Hebrew history began soon after his time, when reminiscences of him were floating freely about. But there is plenty of the same sort of material elsewhere in the Old Testament, and even the New Testament is not without it.

Why should ministers select any such human interest stories to preach about? Because, to begin with, they are so inherently interesting. They catch and hold the attention of the listener from the start, and open his mind wide to any lesson the preacher may draw from them. But more than this, he may well do it to help break down the old distinction between the Bible and all other books, and the biblical people

and all other people. That religion is a thing by itself, quite divorced from the fears, hates, loves, ambitions of the people who have it, was just as far from being true in biblical times as it is now. Whoever shows religion to be an integral part of life does people a service. To show how, while men change, man continues in all the ages much the same and runs true to his form, whatever it is, under Roosevelt much as he did under Saul or David, helps to establish the spiritual unity of the race and of its religious development.

As a first example of these human interest stories one may take the death of Eli as recounted in the fourth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. The Israelites were at war with the Philistines, and had been beaten in battle. To ensure their success in the next encounter they took the risk, obviously a great one but justified to their minds by the critical nature of the situation, of taking the "ark of Jahweh" into the battle with them. What was in the ark seems still to be a matter of uncertainty. But it was the most sacred object the Israelites possessed. If we may trust the statement of the Philistines, the Israelites had never ventured it in battle hitherto. The result, unfortunately, was quite the reverse of what the Israelites hoped. The appearance of the ark upon the battlefield was a signal to the Philistines to rally their forces and do their best. This they did, to the defeat of the Israelites and the capture of the ark itself. What the ark did to the Philistines after they had captured it is equally interesting but is another story.

Eli's two sons were fighting in the Israelite army. For many years they had been little comfort to Eli. Many complaints had come to him concerning their scandalous conduct at or about the shrine, and Eli understood from a dream

of the child Samuel that his own career was likely to end in disgrace on their account. This fate he seems to have accepted as fathers have to do, though it was accompanied, as it is always likely to be, by some heart-searchings as to his own responsibility for the bringing up and the consequent character of his sons. Eli was sitting on a bench by the wayside waiting for news from the battle. He could not have been unmindful of the fact that his two sons were in this battle. But if the narrator understood him correctly, this was not the thought uppermost in his mind. For he explains his position by the wayside by saying that "his heart trembled for the ark of God." It was the symbol of all that he loved best and had spent his long life to perpetuate and defend. A man came running with news and told it in the town. Eli heard the uproar and asked for the news. The man told him: Israel had been defeated; there had been a great slaughter; his two sons had been killed. All this the old man, ninety-eight years old, seemed to bear. But when the messenger came out with his final statement, "the ark of God is taken," this was too much. Eli, "old and heavy," as the narrative says, fell from the bench; his neck was broken by the fall, and he died. The little appendix which can hardly be separated from the major part of the story tells how the wife of Phineas named her son, born on that fatal day, "Ichabod," meaning there is no glory, and said: "The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken."

It is often said that Jahweh was a god of battles. To be sure one of his names was Jahweh of Hosts, or of armies. But this should not be held against Jahweh. Every god in these old times was a god of battles. He was the god of his people. When his people were victorious, then he was vic-

torious over the gods of the enemy. When his people were defeated, he suffered that defeat with them. Jahweh was a god of battles only in the sense that every ancient god was and had to be. Unless, of course, he was going to desert his people when they went to war.

Here comes up the old, old question of great fathers and small sons. George William Curtis remarks, in a quotation which I cannot locate, that it is not observed that families improve with age, but that they are rather like a comet, of which the head is the substantial part, while the tail though long and luminous is gradually shaded into obscurity. If the preacher is psychological-minded he may have some explanation to give his people of this fact which still finds illustration not only in national history but in the nearer life of every community. There is the old, old question as to how far a good man may rightly serve the community, even in its most sacred interests, at the expense of giving too little time and attention to bringing up his own boys — a fault of which many ministers have been known to be guilty. There is the question of the tangible and the intangible in civilization and especially in religion — the sacred box on one side and on the other the ideas and convictions that made up the spiritual inheritance which Israel was destined to bequeath to the world.

But most obvious of all there is the picture of human life as it was, as it is, as it will be, with its hopes, tragedies, risks, failures and its ongoing march in spite of every temporary defeat. We have no ark to lose. Perhaps we have got far enough to understand that nothing external which can be taken from us can ruin us. But certainly we all have our perplexing choice between the public service and the per-

sonal good; and sooner or later, though not in the same form as that in which it came to old Eli, calamity and disaster descend upon us. One thinks of old Eli sitting by the gate, and of the words of Shakespeare: "A man must wait his going hence, even as his coming hither; ripeness is all."

A story equally rich with personal elements is that of Saul's visit to the fortuneteller found in I Samuel 28. (If anyone thinks such incidents are out of date, let him get a little better acquainted with his own community.) Saul is a sad instance of a man who was never equal to his job. He was chosen for his size and his good looks — "head and shoulders above the rest of the people." Some wit has said, "All men are equal — from the neck down." Even that is not quite true. But the main advantage of any man over another lies in what is above his shoulders. And it was there that Saul was weak. Moody, irresolute, suspicious, alternating quickly between fits of bravery and of cowardice, "unstable in all his ways," as James says, he was marked for failure from the start. For only a few months his star ascended, then hung for a moment in the sky and began to decline.

This unusually fine example of the storyteller's art shows Saul in one of his worst moments. The kingdom is slipping away from him. Samuel, the power behind the throne and the author of Saul's rise from obscurity, has gone back on him. In a fit of reforming activity Saul had some time before this tried to rid the country of fortunetellers and dealers in the black art. Perhaps he had not been very thorough about it. Or maybe the devotees of magic knew how to evade the officers. At all events one such woman had continued to ply her trade at Endor. Saul first tried to get help from Jahweh. He sought a revelation in dreams, but none

came. He tried the sacred lot, but it also yielded no result. Convinced that Jahweh as well as Samuel had deserted him, Saul turned to the only resource that was left, the fortune-teller. He did not, apparently, himself know where such a person was to be found. But he knew there must be some left in the country, for he turned to his servants and told them to find one for him. They knew without stopping to inquire where she could be found. So Saul disguised himself, put on old clothes, and went, as seekers after such wisdom still go, in the night, to call upon the witch.

His conduct of his case reveals much the same wisdom on his part as is often displayed by visitors to similar places these days. He tells the woman at the start that he will name the person with whom he wishes to have conversation. He wants to talk with Samuel. As Samuel had long been the most familiar figure in Israel, this gives the woman information as to what sort of person she is to see in her trance. First, however, Saul has to reassure her that no harm will come to her from indulging his wish. Thus reassured she proceeds. "I see a god coming up from the earth," she says. A trifle indefinite. The old versions say "gods," making it still more so. Saul, however, wishes to see one person, not many, and asks "What does he look like?" "He is an old man," replies the woman, "and wears a shawl."

Saul concludes at once that it is Samuel whom she sees, and though he probably does not see the ghostly figure himself he bows reverently to the ground. Then Samuel, doubtless through the mouth of the woman, though the author does not stop to say this, talks with Saul. Samuel asks him what he wants. Saul recounts his present circumstances, how the Philistines have made war on him and how God

seems to have deserted him, neither dreams nor prophets being able to elicit any response from him. Samuel says what he might have been expected to say: "Why do you ask me what to do, since Jahweh has departed from you?" Samuel, living or dead, is the faithful servant of Jahweh. If Jahweh has deserted Saul, he cannot expect any hope or encouragement from Samuel. Nor does he get any. Samuel tells him plainly that his end is near. His rival, David, will supplant him. Saul himself shall die in battle with the Philistines, and his sons with him. Samuel adds a reason for the desertion of Saul by Jahweh which one may suspect, from the conduct of Samuel in the slaying of Agag, was also and equally Samuel's own reason for deserting him.

Saul has not only told the woman whom he wants to see, so that she will know what to answer on Samuel's part, but his own part in the conversation has quickly betrayed his own identity, thus adding considerable human help to whatever extra-human resources she has to fall back upon. The conversation is therefore quite complete on the part of both speakers. It leaves Saul, not unnaturally, lying full length upon the earth.

The woman is alarmed for him. The fact that he had fasted all day left him the more open to the devastating effects of Samuel's prophecy. The woman, seeing his plight, reminds him how she has acceded to his request, dangerous as it was for her to do so; he must now accede to hers. He must eat something. His servants have already urged him to do so, but he has refused. He yields however to the entreaty of the woman. Then follows a detail which to the modern man, accustomed to have his meals provided him more promptly, seems a little queer. The woman has a fat

calf in the house, which she proceeds to kill and dress; and kneading some flour she bakes some unleavened bread, and Saul, who has meanwhile risen from the floor and has been sitting on the bed, sits down with his servants to a square meal. How much time all this butchering and kneading and baking would take is not for a mere man to guess. But it certainly seems as if Saul needed something to eat more immediately than is here provided for. However that may be, after the meal he and his servants depart, getting away before daylight.

As always in these old stories, certain ancient religious ideas come out incidentally. There is the idea of revelation by dreams, by the casting of the sacred lot and by the mouth of the prophet. There is the belief that the souls of those who have departed linger near, and by the use of the right means in the hands of the right person can be brought back to advise us. There is the persistence of this latter idea, surviving on down into modern scientific times and still the foundation stone of all spirit communication. But clear above any of these items rises the picture of a broken man, in his last extremity, at his wits' end, facing the close of a career for which he was not born nor intended, which has been thrust upon him chiefly because of his physical stature and which if he had been left to himself he would doubtless have had sense enough not to seek. So General Grant and Mr. Taft, though not for the same reasons, were thrust into the presidency for which neither their temperament nor their former experience had fitted them and where they fell prey to forces which they could not control. So fate picks up some men and puts them into places that are too big for them. I believe it is Carlyle who somewhere remarks that it

is no harm to be small (I am certainly not implying that either General Grant or Mr. Taft was a small man; far from it), if he does not get into a place that is too big for him. To find the biggest place we can really fill, and fill it full, without the vaulting ambition "which falls on the other side," and in spite of circumstances that would force us beyond our powers, is not an easy thing. But at all events whoever is interested in human interest stories, in the Bible or out of it, will find an engrossing and pathetic one here.

Of the story of the friendship between David and Jonathan (I Sam. 18 and *passim*) I do not stop to speak, since it may be assumed to be too familiar to require comment. But it is a moving story. In his essay on "Followers and Friends" Lord Bacon says, "There is little friendship in the world, and least of all between equals." One of his editors remarks, "It seems hardly probable that Lord Bacon reflected deeply when he penned this passage," and quotes from one of Dr. Johnson's essays in *The Rambler* to quite the opposite effect: "Friendship is seldom lasting but between equals, or where the superiority on one side is reduced by some equivalent advantage on the other. Benefits which cannot be repaid and obligations which cannot be discharged, are not commonly found to increase affection; they excite gratitude indeed, and heighten veneration, but commonly take away that easy freedom and familiarity of intercourse, without which, though there may be fidelity, and zeal, and admiration, there cannot be friendship."

Most of us would say that Dr. Johnson was more right than Lord Bacon. However that may be, and however the friendships of many of us may fall out of repair (to adapt a saying of Stevenson's), by misunderstanding or neglect,

the literature of the world is enriched by the stories of loving friends like Orestes and Pylades, Damon and Pythias, that come down from the most ancient times. And among these none is better, none is more full of the real genius of friendship, than the story of David and Jonathan. If the loving imagination of the narrator has played somewhat about these two figures as about their more ancient prototypes, that only indicates the unshakable conviction of men that, given two spirits of sufficient purity and elevation, a friendship is possible which no ambition or envy can mar, and which can go far toward alleviating the worst distresses that can come upon us. It is a piece of idealism worth instilling into the minds of a disillusioned and somewhat cynical generation.

There is another human interest story connected with David, not so well known. It is recorded in the twenty-fifth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. David was in exile and had to have some means by which to live. He organized a band of freebooters and devoted their energies and his own to the protection of the shepherds from robbers and marauders. Of course he expected some return for this, and had a right to it in spite of the fact that he had appointed himself to this office. One man, named Nabal, whose property David and his band had protected, refused him any recognition for his services. In truth, when his attention was called to the fact that David had taken nothing from his flocks but had prevented anyone else from doing so, he spoke disrespectfully of David and said there were many men who had broken away from their masters and were living off the country, and he could not be bothered with them.

This disrespectful reply of Nabal's came to the ears of David, who was naturally incensed by it. He called together

two hundred of his four hundred men, and proposed a descent upon the house of Nabal. The news of this prospective assault was reported to Nabal's wife, Abigail, who took immediate measures to prevent it. She made up a liberal present for David and with some of her servants started on the way to meet him. One cannot say how much David's predilection for attractive women had to do with his reception of Abigail, but it was a friendly one. Nor can one quite approve of the manner in which Abigail referred to her husband in her conversation with this stranger who was on his way to burn Nabal's house over his head. "Regard not this worthless fellow, Nabal," she said, "for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name and folly is with him." Not quite the way one would like to have his wife speak of him, even when she is trying to save him. But David naturally takes no offense at it. He accepts Abigail's present and calls his expedition off, remarking to Abigail that she has come just in time, for otherwise there would not have been left to Nabal on the morrow so much as one male child. Abigail is naturally greatly pleased, and she tucks in a remark that may not seem to our modern ears — or would not have so seemed before our ears became so very modern — quite modest. David, she says, she knows will become king; and when he becomes king perhaps he will remember her. He makes no promise, but the sequel shows that none was necessary.

Abigail goes home, and finds Nabal drunk. She tells him nothing at that time. But next day, when he is sobering off and doubtless has a splitting headache, she tells him of the danger from which she has rescued him. The poor man has heart failure and after about ten days, probably spent by

him in wondering whether the danger was actually over, Jahweh "smote Nabal, so that he died." No sooner did David hear of the death of Nabal than he sent his servants down to Carmel to tell Abigail that he wanted her for a wife. Abigail apparently lost no time mourning for Nabal — she had mourned enough over him while he was alive — but went immediately. Had she not indeed hinted so much when she talked with David? It cannot be said that they lived happily ever afterwards, for David took another wife at about the same time. But Abigail was faithful to him. She shared the life of the camp with him when he was at war. She was captured in a raid of the Amalekites on Ziklag, where David had left her for safety. But David got her back, and no doubt Jahweh strengthened David's arm against the Amalekites by the thought of Abigail's presence among them.

It is in this story that Abigail uses the striking phrase, "The soul of David shall be bound up in the bundle of life with Jahweh." "In the bundle of life." Speculating on these words, Sir John Frazer, in his *Folklore in the Old Testament*, tells some interesting facts about primitive peoples who believe that souls can be extracted from their bodies and kept by the priest during a time of danger, so that if the persons are killed the immortal part of them will be safe; of a certain Australian tribe who hang their souls up in a bag outside the village when they go out to hunt, and so on. Anyhow, that's what man is, a bundle: a bundle of nerves as we often say, a bundle of relations as Emerson called him, a bundle of desires and ambitions and purposes bound together by the mysterious thing which we call his personality. Some men are disorderly bundles, parts of

them being crooked, or sticking out loose and not well tied in. And every man is part of a bigger bundle, for that is what life also is. Family life, social life, intellectual life, the spiritual life, every kind of life, is a bundle. Some men are crooked sticks in it, and some men lie straight in it as they should. For that matter, the whole world is a bundle; not a mere pile thrown loose into space, or dumped onto the sidewalk in a little back alley of the physical universe, but a bundle of life held in the hand of God. I am grateful to Abigail for the luminous phrase "the bundle of life."

There is an equally intriguing human interest story in the life of Jeremiah related in the forty-fourth chapter of the book that bears his name. A sermon on this chapter will give the preacher a chance to explain once more, for once is far from enough, what a prophet was and what he tried to do. For in spite of all the knowledge of Hebrew prophecy that has been current in theological schools for several generations, the idea still persists in the popular mind that the business of the prophet was to write history several centuries in advance of its occurrence. Jeremiah was the adviser of the kings and people of his time, both religiously and politically. He advised the kings to give up their flirting with Egypt. Assyria was the stronger power. Israel could not hope to maintain his independent position. Jeremiah therefore advised the kings of his time to make an alliance with Assyria, accept what conditions the Assyrian kings imposed, and behave themselves. If they would do that, he said, they would be left quietly in their own land. But the kings would not take his advice. At the same time Jeremiah advised the people to leave off their worship of the sun, moon and stars, and stick to the worship of Jahweh. But the peo-

ple would not take his advice. Indeed nobody ever seems to have taken it.

So matters went on from bad to worse; Jerusalem was taken by the Assyrians and some of its people were deported. A king was set up who foolishly revolted against the Assyrian rule. In the face of an attack by the Assyrian army which had come to reduce the revolt, some of the people took occasion to escape into Egypt, where numbers of their countrymen had preceded them. Now though nobody had ever taken Jeremiah's advice about anything, yet a prophet is a handy man to have around. Sometime you may want to do what Jahweh tells you to; and if you have no prophet to tell you what Jahweh says, that is bad. Besides, Jeremiah was the one really great man in Jerusalem. Among a lot of feeble princes and credulous, superstitious people he was the one recognizably great man; exhibit A for his generation. For many years the government had tolerated him, much as the Russian government tolerated Tolstoi. They put him in jail, they forbade him to preach, but they spared his life. He was too valuable to lose. So now, irony of fate, they carried him to Egypt with them.

But there was one consolation to Jeremiah. He had told the people that Jahweh would destroy Jerusalem for their idolatrous worship. And Jahweh had done so. It would be good to go even to Egypt to find that the people had learned their lesson. So to Egypt he went. And he found there, not what he had expected, a reformed and penitent people. No, he found his old compatriots and fellow townsmen and women gathered in the streets, burning incense and offering cakes to the heavenly host! They had not learned a thing, it seemed. Jeremiah remonstrated with them. He said that

it had happened as he had threatened them; their city had been destroyed and they had been exiled in a strange land because they had forsaken Jahweh. The answer which they made is worthy of being quoted. "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of Jahweh, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly perform every word that is gone out of our mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off burning incense unto the queen of heaven, and pouring out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine." What could Jeremiah say? Nothing; except to repeat what he had said so often, and to walk away.

We commonly say that we learn by experience. In the large, there does not seem to be any other way to learn. But what we learn by experience depends upon what we bring to it. History is a matter for interpretation. Jeremiah and his compatriots had been through the same experience. He drew from it the sin of forsaking Jahweh; they drew from it the folly of forsaking the queen of heaven. We go through a war that almost destroys the world. Some people draw from it the lesson of peace and international good will. Other people draw from it the lesson of preparedness and an aggravated nationalism. The difference between Jeremiah and his contemporaries was that Jeremiah brought to his interpretation of experience his conviction that Jahweh was a reality and Ishtar a fraud; that spiritual apostasy will be followed by national disaster. The others brought to the

same experience no deep-lying convictions of any sort, and therefore could only argue, "*post hoc, ergo propter hoc.*" It is the business of the preacher to help people to such presuppositions as will make their interpretation of history and experience a help instead of a hindrance. All this is embodied clearly enough in this story. But, after all, the thing that stands out in it is the picture of poor old Jeremiah, "flabbergasted" in the presence of people who could not understand.

There is another incident in the career of Jeremiah, a little earlier than the one just described, which is equally revealing. The account of it is contained in the thirty-sixth chapter of his book. He had given his advice and offered his rebukes, orally, for many years. Thinking that it would be well to have a record of them he got Baruch the scribe to write them down at his dictation. A little while later there was a big festival in Jerusalem to which came pilgrims from the surrounding towns. Jeremiah for some reason could not go to the temple on this occasion, possibly on account of some ceremonial uncleanness. So he told Baruch to go and read to the people what he had written in the roll. It might be, thought Jeremiah — he could never give up that hope, however often it had been disappointed — that hearing these words once more they would repent. Baruch went and read the writing to the people. It was reported to the king. Someone was ordered to get the book and bring it to the king's chamber. Jeremiah meantime had been warned by his friends to keep himself out of sight. The narrative says that "Jahweh hid him"; but the narrative leaves room for suspicion that in this Jahweh had the active co-operation of the prophet.

So the book was brought and read in the presence of the

king. Far from repenting, he took one page after another of the book as it was read and, cutting it off with his knife, threw it into the fire. He had, it seems, the same idea which modern officials entertain, that force is the best answer to ideas and that if you can destroy the written words you thereby render false and harmless what the words said. When Jeremiah was told what the king had done he told Baruch to get another roll, on which he reproduced his former book; and, adds the narrative, "there were added besides unto them many like words." The new edition was revised and enlarged; and I suspect that the words which were added were among the strongest in the book.

The character of Jeremiah has been strangely misunderstood. I suppose that with his figure standing as it does in Sargent's Frieze of the Prophets in the Boston Library and reproduced and circulated everywhere, it will be many years before the injustice that has been done to him is righted. But of all the prophets he least deserves the reputation of a weeper. Doubtless his reputation as a man too prone to tears has been derived largely from the mistaken idea that he wrote the Book of Lamentations. It is much as if the works of Irving Berlin had been attributed to Beethoven; and the works of Berlin being easier to sing and whistle and remember than the symphonies, people had remembered Beethoven by them and he had come to be regarded as a writer of smart and snappy tunes.

Jeremiah was anything but a weeper. What sort of man he was is nowhere illustrated better than in this incident. A little stubbornness, or even a little stuffiness, is now and then a great help even to a servant of the Lord. In his *Human Nature and the Social Order* Professor Cooley has

a remark which is applicable to the conduct and character of Jeremiah. "I have in mind," says Professor Cooley, "a man who is remarkable for an aggressive, tenacious and successful pursuit of the right. He does the things that everybody agrees ought to be done but does not do, especially things involving personal antagonism. While other people deplore the corruption of politics, but have no stomach to amend it, he beards the corrupt official in his ward or exposes him in the courts or the public press, all at much cost to himself and without prospect of honor or other recompense. If one considers how he differs from other conscientious people of equal ability and opportunity, it appears to be largely in having more bile in him. He has a natural fund of animosity, and instead of spending it blindly and harmfully he directs it upon that which is hateful to the general good, thus gratifying his native turn for resentment in a moral and fruitful way. If there were more men like him," Professor Cooley adds, "it would be of benefit to the moral condition of the country."

Such a man was Jeremiah, with "a native turn for resentment," which he gratified "in a moral and fruitful way." He undoubtedly knew that he was a better man than the king who had destroyed his book. And that a less intelligent and less respected man, just because he happened to be king, should throw his book into the fire, caused him to draw at once upon his "natural fund of animosity." He might have kept quiet any time during the last twenty years. When the king burned his book he might have said, "I have told him once; if he won't listen, I've done my duty." But his ire was roused. Nor is there any reason to suppose that this was solely because he regarded himself as a mes-

senger from Jahweh, and an affront offered to him was an affront to Jahweh. There is no indication whatever that he liked affronts to himself, or that if the affront had been a purely personal one he would have gone off and wept about it. Amiability is not the only virtue, even of a servant of God.

It is worth while preaching a sermon on this incident if one accomplished nothing more in it than to do a belated justice to a man who has been persistently misrepresented and misunderstood. There is much more in the incident than this, to be sure. There is the item already mentioned of the method of replying to an idea with something besides another and better idea. There is the question, mentioned in another connection, of what sort of man a prophet really was. There is the question of how he got his word from God and how he was sure it was such a word. These and other items like them may be approached from other passages in the life of Jeremiah or of some other prophet. But the personal character of Jeremiah, as revealed in this incident, is rich in spiritual suggestion.

To return to the career of David, there is one incident in his life so full of the personal element that I venture to submit a sermon upon it. I call it

THE WOMAN AT THE WINDOW

Under the somewhat sensational title, "The Woman at the Window," I propose, not an exposé of some modern scandal, but only a consideration of an ancient episode recorded in the Second Book of Samuel (II Sam. 6). It is the story of how David brought the ark into Jerusalem.

The ark was a portable shrine of great sacredness and an-

tiquity. Just how old it was nobody knows, for there is no account of its origin. What finally became of it nobody knows, for it disappears from the records after the time of Solomon. There are conflicting accounts of what was in it — perhaps some images, sacred vestments, ancient laws engraved on stone, the shewbread, candlesticks. But for many years it was the most sacred object Israel possessed, the visible seat of Jehovah.

Twenty years before the events narrated in our chapter the Philistines captured the ark in a battle with the Israelites and took it to Ashdod. But it brought the people of that town bad luck. They kept it a few months and sent it to Bethshemesh, but it brought bad luck there also. So they took it to Kirjath-Jearim and there, in the house of one Abinadab, it stayed for twenty years.

In those twenty years Samuel had died, Saul had run his troubled course, David had fought his wars and was now fairly established in Jerusalem. For the first time he was in position to bring the ark into the city.

It was an occasion of great ceremony. They set the ark upon a new cart. Two of Abinadab's boys drove the oxen. David and those with him marched before it, playing on harps, cymbals and castanets. With all their precautions an accident occurred. One of the oxen stumbled and the cart rocked. One of the drivers put out his hand to steady the ark. The author says that the "anger of Jehovah was kindled against him" for his presumption, "and Jehovah smote him there, and he died." Whatever actually happened, and whatever the explanation of it, David was alarmed. It looked as if the expedition did not have the approval of Jehovah. David was barely established on his throne and

in no position to take any risks. So he took the ark into the house of Obed-Edom. In quite the same way, when Buddhism was first imported into China, the emperor set up the statue of Buddha in somebody else's house for three months before he risked it in his own.

But the ark brought good luck to Obed-Edom. David heard of it and went to Obed-Edom's house for it. This time he took even more precaution. The ark was lifted upon the shoulders of men. They went six paces and stopped, while David sacrificed an ox and a fatling. Then they went on, David dancing before the ark.

The dance has fallen into disrepute with devout people of modern times, but among all ancient peoples it was the natural and orthodox expression of religious emotion. "In English cathedrals dancing was a part of Christian worship as late as the fourteenth century. At Paris, Limoges and elsewhere in France, up to the seventeenth century, the priests used to dance in the chancel at Easter time. In the cathedrals of Seville and Toledo, Spain, some remnants or echoes of the old religious dancing still remain at a few special festivals." (See Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life*.) So David danced, and put both heart and muscle into it. Danced, says the writer, naïvely but expressively, "with all his might." And he wore a sacred garment, a scanty linen apron called an "ephod."

The procession moved without untoward incident and with great éclat into the city. It was like bringing back a flag captured and long held by an enemy. Like Venice's getting back the bronze horses that Napoleon stole from St. Mark's. Except that the ark was more precious than many bronze horses; more sacred than many battle flags. In some way not easy for us to appreciate but entirely real to the Israelites of

the tenth century B.C., it insured the presence of Jehovah himself in his city. And here it was at last, after twenty years, safely inside Jerusalem. David had righted an ancient wrong and laid the spiritual foundation for his kingdom. It had been a great day.

But there was one fly in the ointment. As the procession moved past David's house there was a woman looking out of a window. It was Michal, his wife. David loved her, and had killed a hundred Philistines to get her. Michal was the daughter of Saul. It is a hard matter to be the daughter of one king and the wife of another one who is supplanting him. Michal stood by David. When her father's soldiers came to his house to kill him she helped him get away. She played her part as a dutiful wife in all the quarrels between him and her father. But it must have been a strain on her just the same.

She loved her husband. But I suppose there were some things about him that she didn't like. It is often so. And the more women love their husbands, the more they are troubled by the things they do not like in them. Michal looked out at David, as the procession came up the street, and saw him dancing like a dervish, with nothing on but a linen apron, and, says the writer, "She despised him in her heart." Poor David — what is the use of being king, what is the use of bringing home an ark, what is the use of anything, if your wife despises you?

David had not seen her at the window. He was too busy dancing to be gazing up to the second stories. He went on unsuspecting and when he had set the ark in the tent that had been placed for it he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to Jehovah. Then David (in olden times a king was his own high priest; even yet the king of England is

nominally the head of the English church) blessed the people in the name of the Lord. Then came the feasting for the whole multitude, both men and women. To everyone a cake, a piece of meat, a flagon of wine. Then the people went home.

David was probably glad to see them go, for he wanted to go home too. Thither he hurried, to bless his own household, as he had already blessed the people, and to receive the congratulations of his wife and family. A good man's family is never far from his mind. A man hurries through a business deal, or a speech he has to make (if his wife is not there to hear him) and hurries home to tell her about it. On the eve of every battle the soldier writes to his wife or his sweetheart. The saying of Captain Stark of Revolutionary fame, "I will do so-and-so (I've forgotten just what) or Mollie Stark will be a widow," is typical. His mind is always on his wife. So David's had probably been, when he had time for a moment to get it off anything else, all day.

So he hurried home to bless his household. And Michal came out to meet him. That was good. It is good if your wife smiles at you when you unlock the door and let yourself in. It is better if she hears you coming and opens the door herself. It is better still if she cannot wait but comes out to meet you. I imagine that when even a king gets home, all his big doings fade from his vision and something better than any of them fills his heart if his wife comes out to meet him.

Alas, alas! For Michal began — and all David's triumphs, not of that day alone, but of the years of struggle for the crown now safely his, turned to dust and ashes in his mouth as she spoke.

"How glorious was the King of Israel today," she began; an ominous beginning. If your wife ever addresses you as Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce or President of the Lion's Club, you may know that it is about over with you. Gone, for Michal, and forgotten, was the red-haired boy who had played the harp to charm her father out of his blues. Nothing remained of the shepherd lad who had slain the giant and won her hand. He was nobody to her now but the "King of Israel." Bad.

And she was sarcastic. I suppose the reason sarcasm is so bad is that it starts out as if it were going to be good. It softens you for the blow that is coming. Why will any of us ever be sarcastic? If we must hurt anyone, are there not weapons enough that are not quite so painful?

"How glorious," said Michal, "was the King of Israel today, who uncovered himself in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself." Not mere prudishness probably, though few men always behave well enough to suit their wives, and David may have brought up from the sheep farm, as Abraham Lincoln brought up from the wilderness, some loosenesses of etiquette that naturally displeased his wife. But she was a king's daughter, and herself a queen. David also was a king; and there are some things that kings do not do. They do not make themselves "common." They remain kings by keeping themselves aloof and appearing, when they do appear, in splendor; so Henry IV advises Prince Hal not to be seen too often. But David had been dancing in a linen ephod before the common people, and especially women and servants. What a king!

Then the family quarrel was on. If a man is going to be

king all over the country, I suppose it will not do for him to be a two-spot around home. So David comes to his own defense. It was "before the Lord that I was dancing," he says. It was no common dance. It was not done for the benefit of the women and the gaping crowd. If they were looking, that could not be helped. But it was a sacred dance, done not for men, but for Jehovah. That was his defense.

But when a man is angry he does not stop with defending himself. So David strikes a blow back. "I danced before Jehovah," he said, "and this same Jehovah, before whom I danced, he it was that put your father down and raised me up in his place." Not pleasant, that, for Michal. And one more parting shot he gave her: "Since you think this is so bad," he said, "I will do worse things than this. And these maid servants whom you mention — I shall have still more honor from them." It was not what he wanted. And he knew it. He wanted honor from her. And since she knew that also, the sharpest blow he could give her was to insinuate that he could get along without her approval, if he had theirs. Even royalty cannot dignify a family quarrel, but only makes it look more sordid and miserable. It was a bitter ending to a day that had begun sweetly. The memory of a great achievement faded quickly to the sound of hatred and bitter words.

Most of the things one would naturally say about this old story have come out in the telling of it. But all of them — those I have hinted at in passing, and those so far unnoticed — sum themselves up in one thing: and that is the distinction, and sometimes the clash, between the life we live with the many people who are not personally dear to us, and the life we live with the few who are. It is the old and familiar

difference between a man's life in his store or his bank, and his life at home. Not at home alone, of course. But, I mean, every man's life spreads out into a wide circumference; and out there on or near the circumference, he works, earns his money, fills his position whatever it is, discharges his functions toward that vague thing we call the public, and goes in and out among people whom he likes well enough and values, to be sure, but who are nevertheless not part and parcel of him.

And every man's life also narrows to a center. Not in his own house merely, but at that point where the lines of other people's lives cross the most often and cut the deepest into the lines of his own, and the personal relations are closest and the personal ties the tightest. And it is here at the center that he really wins or loses, and that his life grows rich and glorious or feeble and impoverished. Out of this center come the forces that sustain him in his efforts further away, the faith that nerves him, the confidence he dare not spoil, the love that consoles him. What he wins out there he wins to bring back and show off here. And everything he wins out there is so much rubbish if nobody cares about it or is pleased by it here. For however far we get from home, and however highly for the moment we value the things we do there, our lives are personal to the core. If a man is wounded away from home, he can go home. But if he is hurt at home, where can he go?

I am interested in this in itself, of course. Why not? Nothing is more true and few things are more important. And I might be content, on the basis of it, just to admonish you: "No matter what you do in any public or impersonal way, be sure to cherish the hearts of those whose lives are part

and parcel of your own." "Cherish the hearts that love you," as Wolsey said to Cromwell. To forget that is to invite disaster. To remember it and to do it is to insure certain blessing.

But I am interested in this further as a symbol and a suggestion. For I think of religion also as a personal thing, and about the most personal of all things. Not in the sense that a man seeks in it merely his own individual salvation. But what religion means is that the ultimate thing in the universe is personality, and that at the center of it there is a heart of love that beats close against the heart of every man. Our own lives are made up of things; we deal with them, buy them, sell them, eat them, wear them. They are made up of achievements also, deeds bravely done, things dreamed and accomplished. But these are not what make life good for us. What makes it good are our personal relations. It is the hearts, beating in unison with ours, of people who count our loss their loss, our gain theirs, and who belong to us as we to them.

So it is with this old, big thing we call the universe. It also is made up of things — stars and worlds and systems; and of achievements, like the hewing out of the river courses and the process of evolution. But what makes it the fit home for the spirit of man is that at the center of it there is a spirit like his own. Religion is personal not only because it is a cry out of the heart of the individual man, but because to that cry there comes an answer just as personal as the cry. And in that answer no envy, no bitterness, no sarcasm — but only a welcome home. So may we hear it, all of us, and may it cheer our hearts always.

CHAPTER FIVE

DIFFERENT TYPES OF RELIGION

I DO NOT wish to exaggerate the popular ignorance of the Bible; it is quite great enough without exaggeration. But I am persuaded that most modernly trained ministers, having long been familiar with the results of recent biblical study, have forgotten how far those results are from the popular conceptions and how many people continue to think of the Bible, for the most part, almost as their grandfathers did. For example, it is not only the popular assumption that there is in the Bible one consistent conception of God, one system of ethics, one spiritual outlook, but also one type of religion. People understand of course that there is a heathen or "baal" worship that comes occasionally to the surface in the biblical narrative. But they think of this as the religion of Israel's neighbors and enemies only. The religion of Israel itself they commonly think of as of one kind from first to last. Nor do they understand in the least the extent to which the religion of Israel was modified by the religion of the "inhabitants of the land," nor what primitive and nonmoral elements it carried in it for how long a time.

This is a complicated subject to which many a volume has been devoted and about which even the well-educated minister can always learn something more. It is not to be expected nor desired that laymen be given a technical training in the matter. But some little insight into it can easily be

given. The advantage of such insight is not only the one that I have spoken of so often, that it helps in an understanding of the history of religion, but it also throws light upon the presence in our own time of many survivals from an earlier and cruder period. Religion, like art or science or philosophy, never makes a perfectly even progress. Just as in this scientific age unscientific ideas linger in many minds, or as certain sections of the populace love crude forms of art at the same time that other sections of it prefer the best, so in religion. Low religion and high, better religion and worse, superstition and intelligent belief, do not succeed each other in regular order from lower to higher but are to be found at the same time in different moral and intellectual strata of the population.

Discrimination in religion is quite as valuable as it is in literature or art. It is just as bad to consider all kinds of religion equally good as it is to hold the same indiscriminating opinion concerning all books or all music. People should be helped toward a discriminating attitude in religion, not that they may be proud of their own kind, but that they may if possible find a kind better suited to themselves. Some little knowledge of how many different types of religion are represented in the Bible, and of how they are frequently represented at the same time, should make people more intelligent about their own religion and more tolerant in their judgment of that of others.

The simplest and most general distinction between one type of Old Testament religion and another is found in the contrast, already referred to, between the religion of Jacob and that of Habakkuk. Jacob's is of the business, percentage type. He promises Jahweh that if Jahweh will see him safely

through the journey he has undertaken, and bring him home, he will adopt Jahweh as his god and give him ten per cent of all profits. Habakkuk says that he will love and serve Jahweh no matter what happens. The same difference is found in people today.

A picturesque presentation of a nonmoral type of religion is found in the story of the migration of the Danites, or of Micah and his gods, in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of the Book of Judges. It is one of the best and most significant stories in the Old Testament. Great was my surprise and disappointment when I found that Goodspeed and Smith in their generally admirable *Shorter Bible* had omitted it. Any Bible without this story is that much too short. In addition to being a sun-clear description of its peculiar type of religion, the story is full of ancient religious ideas and also of higher-critical hints. It may be briefly retold as follows:

A woman of the "hill country," whose name is not given, had had some money stolen from her and had pronounced a curse upon the thief. The thief turned out to be her own son, Micah, who confessed to the theft and restored the money. The curse could not, of course, be recalled. But Micah's mother did what she could to counteract it. She pronounced a blessing upon Micah and dedicated a part of the silver to make images for Jahweh. Micah took the money, had the images made, and set up a little chapel or shrine in which he placed these images, "a house of Gods" the narrator calls it, including an ephod and teraphim. He had no priest, but as the spiritual head of his household he consecrated one of his own sons as priest.

A young Levite came along looking for a position. It was

as if Micah had hitherto got along with a Y. M. C. A. man but now had the opportunity to employ a graduate of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. He struck a bargain with the Levite — ten dollars a year and his board and clothes. Micah was still so much the head of his own establishment that he personally consecrated the priest as he had previously consecrated his own son. The arrangement was satisfactory to all parties concerned. Micah was especially pleased over it and remarked that he was now sure of the blessing of Jahweh since he had a Levite for his priest.

Then a group of spies from the tribe of Dan come wandering by, and put up over night at the house of Micah. The Levite seems to have been an old acquaintance of some of them; or perhaps they only recognize his provenance by his speech. At all events they are much impressed with Micah's religious equipment which, although Micah is a lone man and not a whole tribe, is better than anything they have been accustomed to at home. They are on their way to see whether the town of Laish offers a good opportunity for plunder and subsequent settlement for the tribe of Dan, and they ask the Levite to get the opinion of Jahweh on the matter. He gets it and it is favorable.

They go on, spy out the town and find it undefended and remote. They return home and report, and the whole tribe of Dan, six hundred men of war besides women, children and cattle, start for Laish. They follow the same route as the spies, and come to the house of Micah. They enter the chapel and steal Micah's gods, the Levite apparently offering no resistance. He could do little against such a mob, to be sure. To give him all possible credit, he does raise his voice in protest, asking the Danites what they are about, to steal

the gods. But this credit is quickly wiped out, for the Danites ask the Levite in return whether he does not know that it would be better for him to be a priest to a whole tribe than to be priest for one little household like that of Micah's. It was much like asking a man whether he would prefer to be pastor in Aroostook County in Maine or in the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church of New York. The Levite does know the difference and, sad to relate, the story says that "his heart was glad." He could not stop the Danites from stealing the gods, but he did not need to be glad about it!

They steal the gods and go on. When they have gone some distance Micah discovers his loss, gathers a few of his servants and neighbors about him and starts in pursuit. The Danites treat him with scorn and ask him what he wants. It is no small matter to Micah. His whole religious establishment is gone — priest, gods and all. Seeing quickly that he is no match for the Danites and has no redress, he goes sadly home again. The Danites go on, sack the town of Laish, set up their shrine with Micah's stolen gods and his time-serving priest in charge of them. And there, says the record, he and his sons continued to be priests till the time of the captivity.

Worst of all, and coming out only at the conclusion of the story, this rascally Levite was Gershom, by name, a grandson of Moses! The King James Version without any intent to deceive obscured this fact. Some scribe, apparently, reading this story had thought it was too bad that Moses should have had such a grandson; and since the reputation of Manasseh was so bad that one more item on the debit side could hardly make it worse, he inserted a Hebrew "n" into Moses and turned it into Manasseh. That Manasseh did not live till several centuries after the events in the story does not seem

to have troubled him. When one can clear the name of a good man with so little trouble, why fail to do it on account of a slight anachronism?

This story bears on its face many of the ancient religious ideas of which we have already spoken. Here is the curse or blessing as a thing that cannot be recalled. Here is the discovery of the will of Jahweh by the casting of the sacred lot before the image. Here is the use of images not as a substitute for the worship of Jahweh but as an instrument in it. Here are also indications of the date of the writing of the story. Twice the author remarks that "in those days there was no king in Israel. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." If anyone thinks this pre-monarchical period was a "theocracy" in which every man did right, he has only to observe those words "in his own eyes," and to notice what these Danites did. The author, in fact, accounts for this evidently lawless procedure upon the ground that the period was one of anarchy. The story must therefore have been written not only after the establishment of the monarchy, but at a time when the monarchy was working sufficiently well to be contrasted with the period of lawlessness which preceded it. In such a time the story was written — perhaps under David or soon afterward. The reference to the captivity may be by a later editor. At all events, if any preacher wishes to show his people in a perfectly simple way one method by which scholars date the various parts of the Bible, he can hardly find anywhere else so good an illustration of it.

But the outstanding thing about the story is the type of religion it reveals. Jahweh is worshiped by the help of images, but that is not the important item. The important item

is the practically nonmoral character of the religion of the period. Stolen money is as good as honest money to make gods of. Stolen gods are as good as any. A rascally priest is as good as an honest one. Jahweh will give his blessing to an expedition which has no other purpose than robbery and bloodshed. One of the latest elements to develop in religion is the ethical element. I am not aware that in their recent attack upon Ethiopia the Italians alleged any divine sanction. But in the World War all the nations claimed it.

It is not an easy matter to get a national religion thoroughly impregnated with the ethical element, and the movement of the Danites was a tribal affair. At all events, if religion had been confined only to those who have behaved themselves in an absolutely ethical manner, what a small place it would have occupied in history compared with the great role it has played. We may, these days, demand of people who believe in God and profess to serve him that they behave themselves — though even now the demand will not be wholly met. But religion, though it should and does promote good conduct, is not a mere hod carrier to morality. It is part and parcel of human nature and exists in its own right. Even people who start out to plunder do well to take their gods with them. The gods will outlive the particular journey and the specific injustice, and sooner or later will work their transformation of society to make such crimes impossible.

I have called attention, in this story, to the use of images in the worship of Jahweh. It later came to be felt that such use was contrary to the purity of the Jahweh worship. But in the earlier times no such feeling appears. When Jacob starts back home with his wives and his other property, Rachel takes with her the teraphim or household gods of

Laban, which the author does not hesitate to say she has stolen; and when Laban comes looking for them she alleges the privilege of her sex in not rising to greet him, and so conceals the images under her dress. Rachel certainly did not intend to carry into Jacob's country the religion of her father, Laban, whatever that was. She expected to be, like Jacob, a worshiper of Jahweh; but she could use the images in that worship.

How early this use of images in the Jahweh worship began, or just how long it continued, may be uncertain. But when Gideon made an ephod out of gold earrings nobody suspected him of forsaking the worship of Jahweh. And though a later writer says that the presence of this ephod in Gideon's home town became a "snare" to him, and that Israel "went whoring after it," this is doubtless the view of a later period. At the time nobody objected to it.

Some confusion arises at this point from the fact that ephod sometimes means a linen apron, and sometimes an image; just what sort of an image, we may not know. But when David says to Abiathar, "Bring hither the ephod," in circumstances where he has no use for an apron; when it is said that the sword of Goliath stood behind the ephod in the temple at Jerusalem; and especially when David had an ephod in his own house, big enough and of the right shape so that Michal could put it into David's bed and make it appear to Saul's servants as if it were David himself, we get at least some general idea of what an ephod was. Yet nobody ever suspected David of being an unorthodox worshiper of Jahweh.

It is often assumed that because the prohibition of images is found in the decalogue therefore the use of images was

condemned and the employment of them practically unknown from the beginning. But in the first place the decalogue, like most of the legislation that is referred back to Moses, is later. And in the second place, people do not pass laws against things that do not occur or are in no danger of happening. In fact, most legislation is against things which have at one time been allowed, but which the growing experience of the community shows to be contrary to the public good. No inference about the use of images in the Jahweh worship can therefore be drawn from the second commandment of the decalogue. And the extensive use of them down to comparatively late times is well attested.

The case of the "golden calves" is a somewhat different one. The use of such a calf is accredited to the Israelites in the journey through the wilderness. Though Moses rebukes Aaron for having made the calf, and indicates that Jahweh will be much displeased at it, this also doubtless reflects the feeling of a later time. At all events there is no indication that Aaron or Israel intended to forsake the worship of Jahweh for that of a calf; they proposed to use the calf as a help in the worship of Jahweh.

Whether the employment of the calf for this purpose did really go back to the period of the Exodus, the calf-worship came to its zenith when Jereboam called religion to the help of revolution and set up two golden calves, the one in Bethel and the other in Dan (I Kings 12:25-30). "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem," he said, and pointing to the golden calves he added, "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Writing after the fall of Samaria, the author of the Second Book of Kings traces the downfall of the kingdom among other things to

these two golden calves. But at the time of Jereboam the people must already have been accustomed to them and must have regarded them as quite legitimate in the worship of Jahweh; since no king, with a revolution on his hands, adds to his difficulties the burden of an innovation in the religious habits of the people.

It is not to be supposed, of course, that either in the case of the golden calves or the ephods, or other images, there was any suggestion of a likeness of Jahweh. They were sacred objects to be used in assisting the attention and the imagination of the worshipers. When Hosea pours out his wrath upon the worship at Bethel, speaking contemptuously about the people's "kissing the calves" there, he is probably incensed not so much at the presence of the calves as at a dissolute form of worship which has grown up around them. And when Amos says that people need not trust in Bethel because Bethel itself shall go into captivity, he also protests not against the methods of worship there but against blind trust in any sort of worship as a substitute for practical righteousness. As to what may naturally be done with passages dealing with this subject I beg leave to submit a sermon at the end of this chapter on the subject of idolatry.

One of the greatest advances in the history of religion is the outgrowing of the old idea of national gods. How natural and necessary that idea was to the ancient world is obvious. The case of David who did not wish to die outside the "inheritance of Jahweh" has already been instanced. There is a brief but illuminating illustration of this idea, dating from a time several centuries later than David, in the Second Book of Kings (II Kings 17:24-28). It was after the Assyrian conquest of Samaria. The King of Assyria had

sent men from Babylon and other Assyrian localities to work the land from which he had deported the Samaritans. The seventeenth chapter of the Second Book of Kings tells how, when these men first came into Samaria, they did not "fear Jahweh." That means, apparently, from the context, they did not worship Jahweh. They did not adopt the cultus of the god of the land. For the land is still Jahweh's though his people have been temporarily removed from it. But every god must not only be worshiped on his own soil but in his own way; Milchom in his way, Dagon in his way, Jahweh in his. These Assyrian immigrants do not understand the cultus of Jahweh and the Assyrian deportation has left none there who can instruct them in it. They therefore proceed with such religious rites and ceremonies as they have brought with them.

Then a condition arises which I suppose we should more naturally attribute to the sparsity of the population and the consequent extension of waste land, but which the Assyrians ascribed to a cause more consistent with the thinking of their time — the lions increased greatly in number and became a menace to the people. The settlers sent word to the king of Assyria, telling him how the lions had multiplied and explaining that it was because they "knew not the law of the god of the land." The king of Assyria saw a simple remedy for this. He sent one of the priests whom he had imported from Samaria to teach the Assyrian exiles how they should worship Jahweh. Whether the lions disappeared after that, the author does not say. He does add that though the Assyrian settlers took up with the worship of Jahweh they did not forsake their old gods but continued to worship them side by side with Jahweh. If a preacher ever wants to preach

about God (as I think I said before), and if he believes that the process which began with a god for every nation and people will not end until we really have a god who is the god of the whole world; and if, again, he does not know, as I do not, any better way of teaching than by the way of contrast, what better starting point could he have than this little story about the lions?

When the average reader of the Bible comes across the word "baal," he thinks of Baal as a heathen god whom the Israelites were constantly tempted to worship, generally yielding to the temptation. But I suppose there never was a god whose proper name was Baal. Baal means lord. If it refers to a man it usually means husband, since it is only in the marital relation that most men attain to any lordship. If it refers to God it may refer to any god whatever, even to Jahweh, who was not improperly thought of as the baal or lord of Israel. The word is in fact almost an exact counterpart of our word "lord," and is used in the same variety of ways. Sometimes it is compounded with some other word to form the name of a place; as Baal Tamar, Baal Peor, Baal Hermon, Baal Hazor and so on. Sometimes it is compounded with other words in the formation of proper names. Saul, Jonathan and David all had sons whose names began with Baal. In these cases it is clear that the word is a less personal and more general designation for Jahweh. Sometimes one baal is discriminated from another by the name of the community which he serves. For indeed there were innumerable baals. There was a baal of this town and of that, a baal of the stream and a baal of the mountain, and so on.

Who were these baals? Apparently they were local divinities whom the Israelites found ruling in Palestine when they arrived. No mention is made of them in the first three books

of the Pentateuch. They appear only after the arrival in Canaan. They were for the most part agricultural gods, gods of fertility. So it came about that the worship of these various baals could and did continue side by side with the worship of Jahweh. It was wise to trust in Jahweh in national affairs. He was the god of the nation and had "brought it up from Egypt." But the Israelite peasant was not so sure that it was safe to trust to Jahweh for harvests. These other gods had been in the land and had had charge of the productiveness of the fields long before Jahweh came there. It is always well to be on the safe side. One god too many is far better than one god too few.

The prophets make fun of the people because they trust Jahweh for other things but fall back upon the baals "who give them their corn and their wine." The prophets contend that Jahweh is the giver of corn and wine also and that the people have no need of these baals and of the semi-heathen forms of worship that had survived with them. Again and again they were exhorted to give them up. Again and again under the leadership of some reforming "judge" or king they did "put them away." And again and again they went back to them. Now and then there was a particular baal, like that of whom Jezebel was a devotee, who rose to some real competition with Jahweh in the national worship; Elijah's exploit on Mt. Carmel, however much exaggerated in later tradition, is an account of one such crisis. But most of the baals were little gods, circumscribed in their power over some small territory or community. Yet, little and special as they were, they interfered greatly with the devotion which orthodox Israelites recognized as being due to Jahweh alone.

Hosea is particularly hard on the people who continue to

look to the baals as the givers of the harvest. He says that Israel "did not know that I [Jahweh] gave her the grain and the new wine, and the oil, and multiplied unto her silver and gold, which she made into an image for the baal. Therefore I will take back my grain in the time thereof, and my new wine in the season thereof, and will pluck away my wool and my flax which should have covered her nakedness. . . ."

The baals disappeared in the course of time. But what a suggestion they carry for a sermon on the way in which God has had to conquer one field of human interest after another for himself! Even in comparatively recent times he was first of all the God of the merely personal life; and some there be who would keep him to that simple role still. Not until modern times was he supposed to have much or anything to do with business or trade. Not yet is he admitted into politics or international relations. For all too long and all too often still, the "spiritual life" is a thing by itself into which God is admitted, to his exclusion from all other concerns. How apt an illustration also is found in the case of these baals, of survivals in religion, and of how no religion, ancient or modern, is or can be wholly independent of the economic and social surroundings in which it lives.

Readers of books on the history of religion are familiar with a phenomenon called syncretism. It is a phenomenon which occurs wherever religions meet one another. People adopt some part of one religion while holding to other parts of their own. Or they try to hold to two or three religions at the same time. No more interesting example of this is to be found anywhere than in the history of Israel. It seems to have reached its climax under Solomon.

I made a mild plea some time back for a belated justice to

Jeremiah to dispel the bad reputation that has been given him. It does not seem quite so gracious, perhaps, but it would be worth while preaching a sermon about Solomon to take a look into the grounds for the reputation for wisdom which he has borne so long. I suppose he was a wise man, or the report to that effect would not have started originally nor persisted up till now. But I must confess that the exhibitions of his wisdom which are submitted in the accounts of his reign have always seemed to me rather slender. His supposedly astute discrimination between the real and the pretended mothers of the babe, which is exhibit A in his case, looks to me as no more than what would have occurred to most men under the circumstances. The *Arabian Nights* contains far more subtle instances of human shrewdness.

Certainly he was not a wise administrator but multiplied taxes in a manner that led to the breakup of his kingdom almost immediately after his death. He was certainly not wise in his family affairs, having far too many wives (even allowing for some exaggeration in the report), thus setting an example quite beyond the ability of any of his subjects to copy, and certainly not greatly furthering the cause of monogamy.

But the least wise thing that Solomon did, from the point of view of the spiritual welfare of his subjects, was to introduce so many foreign ideas and practices in religion; perhaps one should say, so many foreign religions (I Kings II:1-8). The narrator attempts to excuse him partially for this predilection for innovation by saying that he was getting old and that his wives got the better of him. If petticoat government was imposed upon such a man as Isaac, and grew more tyrannous over him too as he grew old, it is no wonder that

Solomon, with so many wives, and so many who must have been younger and more vigorous than he, should have been swayed from the faith in which he was brought up. However this may be, the author says that he "went after Ash-toroth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milchom, the abomination [the author will not call him a god] of the Ammonites." He also built "a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon."

The religious syncretism which Solomon thus unwisely established in Jerusalem received accretions from other kings from time to time. When Josiah (II Kings 23) some three hundred years later attempted a drastic reformation, what he found, not in outlying districts and among ignorant people, but in the temple itself and under the patronage of kings and priests, is astonishing to read. He took out from the temple all the vessels that had been made for Baal (perhaps some particular baal of foreign extraction and so deserving of capitalization), and the asherah (or sacred pole) probably originally connected with tree worship, and destroyed the houses of the sodomites that were located within the temple area, and "the horses that the men of Judah had given to the sun," and the chariots, and the altars that were on the roof and that had no business there. There they were, all in or on top of the temple itself, the very dwelling place of Jahweh! Sun worship, sacred poles, sodomites, and all sorts of degraded and degrading deities and their worship, right there in the temple. "The brazen serpent which Moses had made" and to which the children of Israel burned incense, he did not destroy only because it had been already demolished by one of his predecessors.

Much syncretism we still have in religion — a substratum of Christianity with layers above it of the old belief in fate and luck and the newer accretions from Christian Science, New Thought and similar cults. If there is any such thing as a pure Christianity, and if it can be disentangled from the amalgam into which it is so often melted down these days, is this not worth an occasional word from the pulpit? And if a man is to speak such a word, from where can he better start than from the example of Solomon, so wise with the women and the child and apparently so unwise in almost everything else? No minister need attack what seem to him debased or hybrid forms of Christianity. But neither is he wise to allow his people to think that he does not know the difference between them and the real article.

This event just referred to in connection with Josiah was of the very greatest importance to the religious life of Israel. The beginnings of it are described in the twenty-second chapter of the Second Book of Kings. Josiah had ordered the temple to be repaired. In the course of their work the laborers found a book. It used to be thought that it was our Book of Deuteronomy. To distinguish exactly what was in the book, and how far its contents are preserved for us in Deuteronomy, may be a task beyond the critical power of the preacher. But he can get help on this from any good commentary either on Deuteronomy or on Kings. And even without that he can tell for himself something of what the book contained by observing what Josiah did when he read it.

If he preaches upon this passage, he may surmise that his hearers will at once ask, "Where did this book come from? Who wrote it? And how did it get into the temple?"

These questions he will wish to answer as well as he can. If he agrees with most scholars in thinking that it was not an old Mosaic document, but something written by a prophetic person unknown to us and hidden in the temple with the thought that sooner or later it would be sure to be found there, he will get a glimpse of how many good prophetic souls there may have been in the times of Jeremiah or just before him who were not allowed to speak freely but who could not wholly stifle the word of God they heard within themselves. He will get a picture of the depths to which the popular and even the official religion had sunk, and of how, for the time at least, it was lifted out of those depths by the vigorous action of a good king. He will get a cross section of Josiah's famous reform with its extremely hopeful beginnings and its less promising end. And he will get, as in few other places in the Old Testament, an inkling of the connection between religion and politics which has repeated itself so often in the history of the Christian church. He will easily make his people see that this, which professed to be a purely religious reform, had consequences in the centralization of temporal power at Jerusalem even more far-reaching. And he will see here the beginning of the growth of that husk about religion which too often kept the kernel of it from the people but which also preserved that kernel in the approaching days of the captivity.

People who live in a period of religious decline, as our own period is sometimes alleged to be, often forget that religion never makes an absolutely steady and unbroken advance. It has its ups and downs as have most other human interests. But that there have been other "Reformations" besides the one of Martin Luther, that these upward starts

come often from unexpected quarters but that they do come and always will come, is an encouraging fact to people, many of whom have little or no knowledge of religion except as it exists in their own time and neighborhood.

This incident of the finding of the book, like that of the burning of Jeremiah's roll, contains also direct and unimpeachable testimony concerning the origins of some parts of the Bible. The power of the written word, the place of the reformer in life, the dangers of the reforming spirit, the difference between a home-and-family and a national religion, the lapses and recoveries to which religion is subject in all ages, are all obvious upon the face of the narrative. One cannot so much as read the account of what Josiah cleared out of the temple, and what he did with the priests at the minor shrines, without getting some realization of how many different types of religion flourished in ancient Israel.

But the clearest and most beautiful contrast between any two types of religion in the Bible is found in the religion of the priest and of the prophet. One most naturally starts in a sermon on this topic from the instance of Amos and his conversation with the priest of Bethel (Amos 7:10-17). What a modern instance it is, to be sure! Here is the same drama that would be enacted in a similar instance today: the outspoken fearless prophet and the timid priest; the one-hundred-and-two per cent patriots calling religion to the aid of their standpatism; the angry retort of the prophet to the priest, his departure from the royal sanctuary, and the subsequent publication of his book.

One sympathizes with the officials when they run against prophets. They usually do the best they know how, but

exactly then is when they need the special grace of God to keep them from doing something absurd or silly which will merely spread the heresy they wish to suppress. Most of the prophets would probably not have bothered to write books if they had been allowed to talk all they wanted to. We doubtless owe the reminiscences of Amos to the attempt of the priest to suppress him at Bethel, as we owe the Book of Jeremiah to the burning of his roll by the foolish Jehoiachim.

From this little battle of words between Amos and the priest we also come to understand how a prophet felt about himself. Not a member of a guild, not in any sense a professionalist, not a man who talks because he must eat, but a man who has heard a word of God which he cannot stifle. Nor, though Amos had his proper proportion of the "native fund of resentment" of which Professor Cooley speaks and which Jeremiah possessed, should we charge him with being more venomous in this quarrel with the priest than he intended to be. When he says that the priest's wife shall become a harlot he intends no slur upon the moral character of that doubtless good woman; he merely means to indicate to what straits the family will be reduced. The ancient woman normally belonged to someone — to her father first, and after he had sold her or given her away, to her husband. If she belonged to no man, if no man would provide for her, there were no professions open to her; her only recourse was the street.

I have said that in a sermon on the contrasted religion of the priest and the prophet one naturally begins with this story about Amos. It might be called the classical example. That one may well begin somewhere is plain from the fact that the religion of the priest and the religion of the prophet

are still with us and still furnish the source of much misunderstanding and dispute. The purpose of such a sermon might well be to get people to appreciate better the functions of both priest and prophet, to make them more appreciative of the priest and more tolerant of the prophet, and to get them if possible to unite in their own spiritual life the characteristics of both. Though one most naturally starts a sermon of this sort from the instance of Amos, as I said, he may start from various other places. I append a sermon on the subject which I originally preached on a Palm Sunday, and therefore took from the New Testament rather than from the Old. I call it

PRIEST AND PROPHET

And when he was come into Jerusalem all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all that bought and sold in the temple and overthrew the tables of the money changers and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations, but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple and he healed them. And when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple and saying, Hosannah to the son of David, they were sore displeased.

Matthew 21:10-16.

There are two contrasting figures in religion. They are not so distinct in Protestant Christianity as they were in earlier times. The functions of both of them are, nowadays, supposed to be combined in one man. But originally they were not only distinct, but distinctly opposed to each other. They were the prophet and the priest.

The priest was the functionary, the official, the manipula-

tor, the practical or handy man, of religion. In early days when the gods were made of wood or stone the priest was their custodian. If the tribe went on an expedition they took their gods with them; the priest carried them and took care of them. When the tribe was settled down and a house was built for the images, the priest was the caretaker of it. He closed it up at night and opened it in the morning. He swept it out and kept marauders away. He put the sacred food before the god; he washed, dressed, anointed him, perfumed him with incense. He carried him in the sacred procession and brought him back to the chapel and set him again in his proper place. He was a sort of housekeeper of the shrine, personal bodyguard and valet of the god.

This position naturally grew in importance. The priest, being always with the god, came to know him better than anyone else. He knew how he ought to be worshiped. Sacrifice was a complicated affair; the priest was the only man who knew exactly how it ought to be done. If you should read all the directions about sacrifice in the Old Testament, you would not know how to offer one properly. The complete directions were carried in the mind of the priest. They were like the trade secrets of the guilds of the Middle Ages. The priest knew how much to burn, what parts to save, how much of this, and how much of that, when and how to light the fire, what words to say and when. Sacrifice was the principal part of religion. The wrath of God might be averted or his lost favor restored by it. But it must be done just right, in one way and in no other. The one man who knew all this was the priest. So he stepped up from the position of personal attendant to the god, and housekeeper of the shrine, to that of intermediary between God

and the people. He alone knew how to perform, properly and in a way to bring results, the great religious act that would make all things smooth again. A position, evidently, of great importance.

Once started on this line, the priest, naturally and without intention or effort, added other powers to those he already had. He knew how to find out the will of God. In Greece and Babylonia, he cut open the sacrifice and read the will of God in its vital organs. In Israel, he knew what to do with the urim and the thummim. He cast the sacred lot. So the king always had his priest near him. The king wanted to do what the god wanted, otherwise he would not succeed. But how was he to know? The priest could tell him. So the priest became the king's adviser. Often he was the power behind the throne. The priest was also a lawyer. The law was supposed to come from God. Before it was written the priest was the man who knew it. When it was written it was put in the temple for safe keeping. The priest was its guardian. If there was a dispute about what it meant, his interpretation settled it. When new copies were made he made them. When the law had to be applied he applied it. Not only lawyer, but judge, a sort of primitive supreme court.

Other things helped him on and up. Few people could read. The priest always had to know how. What few books were written were given to him to keep. He became the guardian of learning as well as of law. The reverence which the unlearned always feel for the learned pushed him one step further up the ladder.

In addition to being learned man, lawyer, court and manipulator of the sacred ceremonies, the priest became a capitalist. Kings lavished their wealth upon the temple. People

who had been delivered from calamity, generally with help of the priest, left at the temple their votive offerings. It became rich in its own right. It was also the safest place to leave money, and the priest became an impromptu banker. Some of the money in it belonged to the priest himself. He had his rent free and his living from his work, so he saved his money. What belonged to the temple and not to him, he often had the disposal of. The Babylonian priests used to loan money at twenty per cent — which would seem to indicate that there were not many men but themselves who had any.

Besides all this, the priest was always close to the people. He had his hand in family affairs. If a man had an unruly son he went to the priest about it. If a woman was accused of unchastity it was the priest who decided whether she was guilty or not. If she had trouble with her husband she asked the priest about it. If a murder had been committed and the murderer could not be found it was the priest who could rid the village of the curse that rested upon it. He was doctor also; when a house had been visited with the plague it was the priest who purified it and let the ousted family back. He pronounced the leper clean, or still unclean. He prayed for the sick. He gave the dead such burial as they had. So he came close to the hearts of the people.

They loved him the more because he was a little above them. His gorgeous robes appealed to the popular eye. At the head of the sacred procession, with his ephod of gold, blue, scarlet and fine twined linen, his shoulder pieces and his curious girdle, his breastplate of cunning work (I quote from the Book of Exodus), his topazes and his emeralds and his sapphires and his amethysts, his bells and his mitre and

his crown, he was a figure from whom the Lord Mayor of London could have learned much. Pillar of society, helper of the troubled, doctor, lawyer, savant, servant of the king, champion of the established order, man of wealth, often the real ruler behind the throne, moneylender, holder of the secrets of the gods and of the people in all ancient society, was the priest.

But he always lacked one element of greatness. He was always a mechanician, never a discoverer or creator. As a priest he was not interested in the deeper question of religion or the more personal and spiritual ones. Who and what is God? What is this voice that we hear within us, condemning or approving? Are the doctrines true? Where did we come from? Whither do we go? Such questions he did not ask. To do so would have interfered with his business. He was the business man of religion. Was the thing done right? Was the lamb without blemish? Was it a year old? Was the water properly consecrated? Were the right words said, at the right time? He preached no sermons. He raised no questions about ultimate reality or final truth, nor about the usefulness of what he did. He was like the schoolteacher who goes on teaching and maintaining discipline but asks no questions about what education is, or is for. He taught no new and disturbing doctrines. He pulled the ropes, he knew the secrets, he opened and shut the gates, he turned the power on or off. Even his personal character was not a prime consideration. The only question was, did he know his business? And did he tend to it? He was, as I said, the business manager of religion. He ran it.

Now the prophet, as I need hardly say, was a totally different kind of man. He belonged to no order. Nobody

appointed him. He generally kept to himself. He emerged, nobody knew whence. He had no credentials. He knew, and sometimes cared, little or nothing about the business end of religion. He needed no apparatus, and had none. He came upon the scene, often suddenly and unannounced, with some word of God that he had heard in his own soul. He saw the injustices of his time, the many poor, the few well-fed and prosperous, the superstition of the people, the profligacy of the nobles and kings, the dependence of the people upon mere religious forms. Deep in his heart were surging the questions that the priest never stopped to ask. Who is God, and what does he really want of us? Does he care anything about all this that the priest does and the people trust in, or does he want something altogether different? How do we serve him? What is worth while in religion and in life? What shall we do to be really saved? Mystic, reformer, critic of religion and of society, puzzler over the deep problems of life, breaker of new paths, pioneer in the spiritual world, poet, enthusiast — just the opposite in every way from the priest, was the prophet.

So Micah stood and cried, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" and he answered, *no*. "He hath showed thee, O Man, what is good. And what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And Amos, still more drastically: "I hate, I despise your feast-days, and I will not smell [the incense] in

your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and meat offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not hear the melody of your viols. But let judgment run down like waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

No wonder the priest and the prophet often came into collision. They were always doing it, but the classical instance of it is the case of the prophet Amos, and Amaziah the priest of Bethel. Amos came up there and began his preaching. Amaziah sent word to Jeroboam the king, This man says things that are contrary to the public good and the established order: "the land is not able to bear all his words." And to Amos he said: "Get into the land of Judah and there eat bread and prophesy there; but prophesy no more at Bethel; for it is the king's chapel and the king's court." To which Amos replied as any prophet would, that he didn't care what it was, the Lord had sent him and he proposed to prophesy.

Now the prophet has long received his due. The Hebrew prophets are the great men of the Old Testament. They transformed the religion of Israel from an official to a spiritual thing. They reached the great idea of one God who made and loves and governs all and who is to be served by a pure life and a clean heart. Great men, undoubtedly. *The* great men of the Old Testament. And great wherever they have appeared, outside of Israel and down to the present time.

I want, however, to say a good word for the priest. If he was not a deep thinker, thinking was not his business. If he was now and then lazy or corrupt, that was exceptional.

If he grew into power that was easily abused, that was not from cunning, nor from selfishness, but just naturally and from the character of his work, as I have shown. In general he has behaved himself fairly well. If he was not a great man he did not set up to be one, and his position did not demand it. If he was not always a good man, even that was generally because public sentiment did not require him to be. If the old world was priest-ridden, that was not so much the fault of the priest as of the world that needed to be ridden and invited the priest to ride it.

The priest—that is the simple fact—has fulfilled an indispensable function in human society. The Protestant minister is supposed to be both priest and prophet. When he preaches his sermons, declares the truth he feels in his own heart, he is a prophet, though you can testify how short he generally comes of being a real one. But when he conducts his service, says the prayers, marries his young folks, listens to the troubles of his people and does his best to help them, when he advises the living and buries the dead, he is a priest.

And most people need a priest much oftener than they need a prophet. People come to church generally “not in search of truth, but in search of help.” When they are in trouble, or stand at the parting of the ways—when the boy leaves for college or the girl goes wrong, when they stand before the casket or the marriage altar—the deep and searching word of the prophet would be as helpful to them as a thunderstorm. What they want is the reassuring word of the priest. I shall probably forget all the prophetic preaching I have ever heard, and I’m not so sure how much it has done for me in the meantime. But the two good men who

came many miles to my father's funeral, and said an appreciative word over him, and rode with us through the snow-drifts to the cemetery, I shall never forget.

The world has many priests and few prophets. That's partly at least because it needs few prophets and many priests. It would be truer to say, it is because it takes a thousand priests to hold what one prophet can win. Again and again the scene repeats itself in the life of organized religion: the prophet with his criticism of the present order and his vision of a better one; the priest fighting him and winning out against him for the moment; then the vision of the prophet justifying itself, religion put upon a new footing; and finally the priest coming in to administer the better order which his predecessors fought.

So it was with Jesus in his time, and with the time since him. Jesus was a prophet. From the start he came into collision with the priests. The climax came on Palm Sunday, when he rode down into the priest-ridden and priest-ruled city, went into the temple, scattered the money changers and uttered his word of God, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations, but ye have made it a den of thieves." "Who is this?" asked the people. And the crowd answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." And, the record continues, "The chief priests and the scribes were sore displeased."

It was not mere cruelty, not bloodthirstiness on the part of the priests. He was utterly upsetting the ordered religious world in which they lived. Their spiritual house, of rite and ceremony and the tithing of mint, anise and cummin, was tumbling around their ears; they did not hate him, but they did not understand him, nor know what to do with him. He

seemed the enemy of all they held dear and that their fathers had cherished before them. He would pull down the pillars of society. Because they did not know what else to do with him they put him to death, thinking without doubt that they did God service. Then the world went on, the priests with it, about their business. But it was a new world. Religion fell back again, as it has to do, into the administering hands of the priests. But the religion they administered was a new thing.

At the cost of his own life the prophet lifts religion to the new level, and the priests who do not understand him and who put him to death begin to administer in his name the new spiritual thing that he has wrought. We ordinary people must live by rule of thumb if we are to live at all. We must have someone to tell us what to do, somebody not too curious about the ultimate realities and the infinite love and justice, who can nevertheless say the right word for us, keep us in the pathway of our simple daily duty and make us feel that God is not utterly beyond us. Then out of the obscurity comes a voice, questioning, rebuking, declaring, and the old order passes and a new and better one comes. So, not without travail and pain and death, but still gloriously and by the power and inspiration of the Almighty, the world draws nearer to the one true God.

To this sermon on Priest and Prophet I should like to add, as illustrative of one subject discussed in this chapter, a sermon on Idolatry. The starting point might be any one of the many strictures of the prophets upon this ancient religious custom. A text from Habakkuk will serve as well as any.

IDOLATRY

They sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their drag.

Habakkuk 1:16.

In Edmund Gosse's volume, *Father and Son*, there is a story of Mr. Gosse's boyhood. His father was a lay preacher in a London chapel. He used to take the little boy to meeting where they often sang "The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone," and talked much about idolatry. Edmund asked his father what idolatry was and his father told him it consisted in praying to anyone or anything but God himself. He asked his father if God would be very angry with anyone who did such a thing, and his father said he would. The words of the hymn ran in the boy's mind, and he concluded to try it out. "One morning," he says, "when my parents were safely out of the house, I prepared for the great heresy. With much labor I hoisted a small chair upon the table close to the window. My heart was beating as if it would leap out of my side, but I pursued my experiment. I knelt down on the carpet in front of the table, and looking up I said my daily prayer in a loud voice, only substituting the address, 'Oh Chair' for the habitual one. Having carried this act of idolatry safely through, I waited to see what would happen. I gazed at the sky above the houses opposite, and expected something to appear in it. God would certainly manifest his anger in some terrible form, and would chastise my impious and willful action. I was very much alarmed, but still more excited. I breathed the high, sharp air of defiance. But nothing happened; there was not a cloud in the sky, not an unusual sound in the street. Presently I was sure that nothing would happen.

I had committed idolatry, flagrantly and deliberately, and God did not care. The result of this ridiculous act was not to make me question the existence and power of God. But what it did was to lessen my confidence in my father's knowledge of the divine mind. My father had said positively, that if I worshiped a thing made of wood, God would manifest his anger. I had then worshiped a chair, made of wood, and God had made no sign whatever. My father, therefore, was not really acquainted with the divine practice in cases of idolatry."

This incident, besides illustrating the kind of things that should not be taught to children, opens the door to an almost forgotten chapter in the religious history of the race. The traveler is still reminded of it as he sees the idols in India or China, the reader as he looks at pictures of Egyptian, Babylonian or Greek life. But to know what idolatry was, how it came to be, how at one time or another it flourished in every part of the world, what was good about it, what was bad about it, and how finally it was outgrown (except where it still lingers) is, I suppose, what nobody stops to do. Now idolatry was not merely a sin into which people occasionally fell. It was not merely a bypath that ran alongside of true religion. It was a necessary and an important stage through which, practically everywhere, religion has gone.

It was not the earliest stage. Men have worshiped pretty nearly everything—stones, trees, wells, rivers, springs, mountains, the sun, moon and stars, animals, parts of the human body. But images came later. They were man's appeal to art—for help in getting his god more distinctly before his mind. They were efforts to picture the mysterious character, the power, the essential humanity of God; they

were implements in the worship of him. At this stage they were necessary; men didn't know how to get along without them. When the tribe of Dan carried off Micah's idols, he said, "They have stolen my gods, and what have I left?" An African converted to Christianity asked the missionary if he could not carry just one little idol in his pocket when he went out among the unconverted. He explained that he was at a great disadvantage with them; they had something to show for what they worshiped, and he had nothing.

Then comes, of course, a later stage. Men begin to feel that God cannot be represented by any image. He is a spiritual being; not capable of being pictured in wood or stone. Superstitions gather about the idols with degrading or immoral ceremonies. They make men satisfied with gross or material conceptions of God. They hinder men's spiritual progress. Then they are seen to be wrong, or at least to be mistaken — not the right way to get at God — and they are ready to be outgrown. Reformers arise and push them off their pedestals or take them down from the walls and burn them.

The careless reader of the Old Testament will hardly realize how much of this story is told there. The second commandment of the decalogue forbade any image of God. This law was supposed to go back to the founding of the nation under Moses. Either the law was much later than that, or else it was too high for the common people. For certainly they had plenty of images. The prophets said they borrowed them from the heathen. Wherever they came from, they were an unquestioned part of the popular religion. People did not worship these idols instead of Jehovah. They worshiped Jehovah through them. When

Aaron made the golden calf, he announced, "Tomorrow we will have a feast to Jehovah." Gideon was a good worshiper of Jehovah; but he made a golden image, and set it up in Ophrah. David always worshiped Jehovah but he had a life-sized image in his house. When the kingdom split in two, Jeroboam was afraid that if his part of it went to Jerusalem to worship, they would desert him, so he set up two golden calves in his own part of the country and said, "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." When Hezekiah broke down the images in the temple, he found among them a brass serpent which, according to the story, Moses himself had made, and to which the people had burned incense ever since his time. But the images came back, so that Josiah had to clean them out again; and he "broke up all the images, and filled their places with the bones of men."

The common people never took any offense at these images. It never occurred to them that Jehovah would be angry about them. They cast the sacred lot before the image, to be sure it came out right. They placed their cakes and burned their incense before it. They kissed the golden calves. It was all part of the popular worship, much as the holy water is in a Catholic church or the collection box in a Protestant.

But the prophets were dead against the practice. That was because the prophets were ahead of their times. They had passed out of the stage where the people still were. And they were filled with scorn and contempt for the whole idol business. When Samaria was in trouble, Hosea cried out, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off." Isaiah predicts trouble for Jerusalem, and says, "In that day a man

will throw his idols of silver and his idols of gold to the moles and the bats." Jeremiah dwells upon the silliness of the idols: "A man takes a tree," he says, "he cuts it out and covers it with silver and gold, and nails it to the wall so it can stand up; you have to carry it, for it can't walk. It can not do any good; it can not even do evil." A later prophet is more sarcastic still: "The smith works with his tongs," he says, "the carpenter stretches out his rule; he marks it out with a line; he makes it like the figure of a man. He hews down a cedar; with part of it he warms himself, with part he bakes his bread; and out of the rest he makes a god; he falls down to it, he worships it, he prays to it, 'Deliver me, for thou art my god!'" The psalmist had seen many idols and was not impressed by them, "They have eyes," he says, "but they see not; hands but they handle not, feet but they walk not, ears but they hear not, neither speak they through their throats. They that make them are like them; so is every one that trusts in them." A senseless, silly, ridiculous business; and so, finally, it died out.

Now I have recalled this forgotten chapter in religious history not for its own sake but because it illustrates what happens everywhere in the moral and spiritual world.

In the first place, things get wrong as we get beyond them. In his speech on Mars Hill Paul applied this principle specifically to idolatry. "The Godhead," he said, "is not like gold or silver or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at" — that is, men knew no better, then God looked the other way, like a wise parent — "but now he commands all men everywhere to repent."

It was so of idolatry. It is so of many things. Drunken-

ness was once only a private or family nuisance; with the city streets and country roads crowded with automobiles, it becomes a crime against society. Slavery was once a comparative good. It was better to make slaves of men taken in battle than to kill them. It became a curse when it lived on in a world where there was no need of it and no place for it. There was a time when war did some good and not much harm. The Roman wars established a rude order among barbarous people and extended the *pax Romana* to distant places. There was not much business that ancient war could destroy. It did not undermine civilization, bankrupt nations, or load unbearable burdens on the shoulders of generations yet unborn. It did not even kill very many men. War becomes the supreme curse of the species when it hangs on in a world that has outgrown it. So it is with personal matters. Vanity is interesting in the little girl, disgusting in the grown woman. Conceit is pardonable in a small boy, offensive as the smallpox in a grown man. Dishonesty in the child is hardly to be distinguished from a vivid imagination, in the man it is plain cussedness. Growing better consists largely in putting away childish things. Things get bad when we outgrow them and still hang on to them.

Second, we all need helps in our personal religion. This is why Catholics are generally so much more devout than Protestants. They have their beads, their candles, their rosaries, their fasts and their festivals; they kneel, they cross themselves; they bow at the sacred name, they go to confessional. They have the stuff out of which to make a technique of the religious life. The Protestant considers himself above all that. He sits bolt upright while the minister prays. He puts on his overcoat during the benediction.

He will go into a church on a weekday and keep his hat on and his cigar in his mouth as if he were in a freight depot. Now the fewer helps to personal religion we have, the more we need to use what we do have. Saying one's prayers is not religion; going to church is not; singing hymns or reading the Bible is not. How often we remark to this effect as if it were a great discovery, and as if it let us out of something.

But if religion is to be anything more than a faint odor of reverence hanging over the dim vastness of the universe, if it is going to have much effect on life, it must be woven back and forth through one's character by a set of religious habits, by using the implements of religion, like churches, meetings, hymnbooks, prayers and so forth. If you have reached the point where you despise these things because you think your religion is something more basic and inclusive, you had better look around; maybe you are not up above these things but off somewhere in a spiritual wilderness or vacuum where there isn't anything. Idols, images, pictures, and so on, we have outgrown. But all the more we need the helps we have.

Finally, there is a kind of idolatry that does not require any idols, and that is just as easy for us now as the grosser kind was in earlier times. It consists of two items. The first is the substitution of the image for the reality behind it. The real idolatry of ancient time came when men forgot that the image was only an image and treated it as if it were a god. So money is an image, of homes to be built, poverty to be relieved, deserts to be turned into gardens. When you love it for its own sake, you are substituting the image for the reality behind it; that is idolatry. Learning is an

image, of diseases to be hunted out and banished, of arts to be developed, of a better world order to be built. When you bow down to it for its own sake, that is idolatry. It is idolatry whenever you put the image for the reality.

And second, idolatry is the love and the worship, in any realm, of the worst or the second-best instead of the best. The love of jazz music, bad architecture and cheap literature are mild forms of idolatry, no doubt. But they are the conscious preference of the bad over the good, the worship of the second-best, the love of something below the highest. The worship of force in a world where gentleness is so much better; of fame no matter on what it rests; of men and women who are up, irrespective of how they got up — what *will* you call this if not idolatry? For it is the exaltation of the second-class in place of the best.

The golden calves are gone. But it is a worse idolatry to worship a big navy than it was to kiss a golden calf. The idols that wink or bleed and have a sacred power to bless or harm are no longer with us. We burn no incense before the image of Buddha or Siva or Confucius. But with us everywhere, and appealing always for our acceptance, our approval, our practical worship, is the second-best. To worship God and nothing and nobody else, what does that mean in practical terms but everywhere to seek, and choose, and love, and reverence, the highest? From the idolatry that is still open to us, may God deliver us. And to the worship of all things pure and holy and good, which is the worship of God, may he turn our hearts continually.

CHAPTER SIX

STUMBLING BLOCKS TO FAITH

I HAVE indicated that many people shy off from the Bible, especially from the Old Testament, because of the presence in it of so many things, apparently related as solemn matters of fact, which nevertheless seem impossible, and the more impossible the more one thinks about them. People do not stop much over the Creation, because they recognize that as a mystery anyhow. But at such stories as Joshua stopping the sun, or the axe swimming to the surface of the water, or the widow's oil can that remained full no matter how much she drew from it, they do very often rebel.

There is a simple measure of relief at this point which is perhaps sufficient for purely religious purposes. That is, to make it clear that all such happenings have no more to do with the Christian life than if they were recorded in some volume totally other than that which contains also the story of Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity.

For other than purely practical purposes, however, this is not enough. After the Bible ceases to be a book to be believed, it remains a book to be understood. And the presence in it of so much that is out of accord with current conceptions of what actually happens in the world is a puzzle if not actually an offense. Individuals, if they are wise enough, can say to themselves, "Oh, well, who knows? Maybe it did happen, maybe not. What difference does it

make?" But this again is no great step forward in an appreciation of the Bible or of the spiritual history depicted in it.

For all these extraordinary, and to most people these days unbelievable, elements in the Old Testament, the preacher has one simple key which more than any other will unlock them all. It is a knowledge of the date of the events related, plus a knowledge of the date of the writing of the story as we have it.

If the preacher prefers, he can use this key on the entire Old Testament at once. He can explain to his people when the Old Testament was put into its present form, and how long that was after the astonishing things which it so frequently relates. He can make people understand that the writing of history was not in ancient times considered an exact science — a goal to which it now aspires but is far even yet from having reached — but was everywhere regarded as a means of glorifying one's own nation and people. He can speak of the oriental imagination and habit of exaggeration and mention the fact that the Hebrews had no conception of nature as a system proceeding according to law, and therefore drew no such distinction as we draw between what could happen and what could not. Having said all this once for all he can rest in the hope, which will be unfulfilled, that his people will remember it and apply it to the cases where it seems appropriate.

But besides the fact that they will not remember it, there are other difficulties about doing it this way. It is not preaching, for one thing. For another it is not very interesting. Not being tied to any incident or proclaimed in connection with any moral or spiritual conviction which ap-

peals to people, it does not come home to them. A still simpler reason is that even in the best regulated congregation not everyone is present on any one occasion, and those who are absent on the one occasion when the minister thus disposes of the whole thing naturally do not get the disposal. New people are, or should be, coming into the congregation all the time, and the minister cannot burden people who have heard all this once by repeating it for the benefit of newcomers.

The best method is the case method. Take an incident to which I have already referred, the sacrifice at Mt. Carmel (I Kings 18). The story has been so immortalized in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, that most members of an ordinary congregation will be familiar with it, though it will be long since most of them have read it. If the preacher will call attention to the exceedingly dramatic character not merely of the events but of the writing itself, and the marked contrast between all the stories about Elijah and Elisha, and the sober historical narrative that makes up the remainder of the book; if he will touch the circumstances of the sacrifice — the amount of water carried to the mountain in a period of prolonged drought, the improbability that the worshipers of the baal would submit their faith to such a test, and the equal probability that not even Jahweh would prove his superiority to the baal in such a manner as is here described — and then will state precisely when these events are supposed to have happened and when our account of them was written, he will have given his people a simple lesson in the higher criticism (not mentioning it, by the way). He will thus have put them into a frame of mind to believe the story as it is if they want to, or to set it aside as a historical

occurrence if they so prefer. He should not have offended anyone in this process, especially if he makes it plain that he is anxious to clear up difficulties, not to create them.

He may then proceed to preach a sermon, say on Elijah's call for a decision between false gods and the true God. Indecision is certainly an enemy of the good life. Elijah's method of convincing the people was a drastic one. The preacher may show how most of us, these days, are not helped out of our indecisions by any such spectacular means, and how in his judgment we are helped out of them. In short, his sermon may and should be just as full of practical and spiritual meat as if he had simply started with the story as it is.

But his introductory and critical examination of the story will have disarmed the folks who were ready to say "I don't believe any such thing ever happened," and will have disposed them to listen where they would otherwise have been tempted to scoff. He will have relieved Elijah of the unnecessary and profitless savagery of killing the four hundred prophets of Baal, unless some of his hearers prefer to think he actually did that — which they are also free to do if they want to. If he has referred not merely to this one story, but to other matter that deals with Elijah and Elisha (for it all hangs together), he will have relieved the latter of at least one piece of conduct which does not heighten his reputation for patience and magnanimity — the calling out of the she-bears to eat the children who had called him "bald-head." When did children fail to do that? And when did they deserve to be eaten for it?

Two other stories, not quite of the same kind, are conspicuous examples of material in the Old Testament that

stands in need of explanation. One is that of Joshua's stopping the sun, the other that of Isaiah's turning back the shadow on Hezekiah's sun dial. Since I append sermons illustrative of what may naturally be done with these two stories, I say no more about them at this point.

To the items I have thus mentioned anyone acquainted with the Old Testament can add as many more as he chooses. It is the kind of material that makes it difficult for people to appraise the Bible in a fair manner and sometimes stands in the way of a religious faith somehow supposed to be tied up with the Bible. To straighten out such things for people who have raised questions about them which they have no means of answering, is to do them a favor. And not a favor to their intelligence alone, but to their spiritual life. People want to believe something, not merely about Jesus and about their own souls, about heaven and hell and the way thither, but about the Bible itself and the things which it narrates. Who is to help them if the preacher will not?

I cannot but think that the whole matter of the miraculous, the unbelievable, the impossible, in the Bible requires a franker treatment than it has received from most ministers. But not much good is to be done by discussing miracles, or the conception of miracle, in any abstract or general way. The many learned discussions that have been carried on from this point of view bear witness chiefly to the avenues of escape that can be opened up by definition and dialectic. Ingenious and abstruse distinctions between the natural and the supernatural and *a priori* arguments about the relation between the two do not make good material for sermons. Nor do they do much good even outside the pulpit.

As it is not necessary to make a higher critic out of the average member of a Christian congregation, so it is not necessary to try to make a philosopher out of him. The question of how miracles should be defined and of whether, when you have defined them as you want to, you have still a place for them in the mind of the modern man, is not a particularly edifying or spiritual one. It is well, of course, to let people understand that they can be Christians irrespective of their attitude toward the miraculous. But people are not interested in the question of miraculosity, if I may coin that word. What they want to know is not what they should hold about the natural and the supernatural in the abstract, but what they are to think about certain stories in the Bible which they used to believe because the Sunday school teacher corroborated them, but which now seem difficult to accept.

Nor is it quite enough that some persons should be able to discriminate for themselves between what in the Bible they will believe and what they will not. For two questions remain: one about the preacher and one about the Bible. The question about the preacher is, "Why doesn't he ever say anything about such things? Is he afraid of them? Doesn't he know about them? Or does he, in spite of his desire to be thought both cultured and progressive, still take all these impossible things as gospel truth?" Many people ask such questions about many ministers. The question about the Bible is, "If there are these things in the Bible that are not so, how did they come there? And what sort of book is a Bible that has so many such things in it? Is it a tissue of legend and fable, perhaps at all points unreliable?" If these questions are to be answered they must be answered

by the minister. He is the only man who has either the opportunity or the knowledge to answer them.

There is a miraculous element in the New Testament as well as in the Old. To some people it seems to be so interwoven with the rest of what is there that to attempt to discriminate is to pull the whole thing down together. I believe that even in the New Testament most people are quite capable of discriminating between the healings of Jesus and the story of his multiplication of the loaves and fishes or of his walking on the water. I believe they can and do make such discrimination without harm to their religious faith.

As a preacher, however, I should have no ambition to convert my people to my particular view on such matters. What I should like to do is to help them to read the Bible with intelligent interest and appreciation. The miraculous element in the New Testament is so subordinate to the moral and spiritual elements that it may generally be left on one side. To be sure, when it is too flagrantly asserted that no man can be a Christian who does not believe in the virgin birth, then I think it is time for the preacher — who really has to be regarded as a Christian if he is going to continue to preach — to call to his aid what he knows or can find out about New Testament criticism and tell his people with entire frankness where he thinks the story of the virgin birth came from, how and why it arose, and why he thinks it is not necessary for anyone to believe in it who sees reason to doubt it.

If I may add here a word out of my personal experience, I have never preached a sermon on miracles as such. I have never implied that people who believed in miracles were "back numbers." I could not well do so, since I do not per-

ceive that they are. But I have taken up one story after another, especially in the Old Testament which has the miraculous element in an extreme degree, and I have preached about it in a way to show people that I did not believe it, and have done my best to tell them not merely why I did not believe it but how it came to be in the Bible. As I was about to leave one parish in which I had spent nine years, a good woman came to me and said that she had noticed my handling of such stories, and it had led her to ask herself how I felt about miracles in general. She had discussed the subject with several other persons who would also like to know. Would I be willing to meet some of them for a frank discussion? I certainly would. At the time and place appointed some sixty or seventy people appeared. They asked me any questions they would and I answered them with perfect frankness. They did not ask about miracles in general; not one of them had apparently ever heard Hume's famous argument, nor any of the answers that have been given to it. They betrayed no nervousness lest one's view of certain historical events recorded in the Bible should deprive one of his faith in God. They just asked about particular events narrated in the Bible over which they had raised questions or felt uncertain or disturbed. The audience was not selected, except as it selected itself by interest or lack of interest in such questions. So far as I could learn, nobody present was disturbed, and many expressed the relief that had been brought to them by a freer and more inclusive discussion than could well be entered upon in the pulpit. My from-time-to-time allusions to such matters therefore appeared to have borne fruit in the minds of those who were educationally and temperamentally prepared for

it. And nobody came to the discussion who was in a state of mind to be hurt by it.

Here are two sermons illustrative of the kind of treatment naturally suggested by the things I have been speaking of in this chapter. I wish they were better, but they are the best I have. I do not submit them as models but only as hints. The first is called

WHEN THE SUN STOOD STILL

Based on the consideration of Joshua 10:1-27.

In considering an Old Testament story like this of Joshua's stopping the sun, two simple facts are to be borne in mind. First, the ideal of history as an exact science is a strictly modern one. The ancient historian could hardly write very accurately if he tried. He had no accumulation of sources or authorities, such as historians have these days. But he did not try. It did not occur to him. Every ancient historian wrote to glorify his own people.

Second, every particular piece of ancient history must be read with a view to the lapse of time between the occurrences and the account of them. Joshua lived about 1200 B.C. This account appears to have been written about 850. That is three hundred and fifty years. From these two considerations it follows that whoever looks in an ancient history for the same kind of accuracy and impartiality which we are supposed to have in modern history is looking for something that does not and in the nature of the case could not exist.

I come then to the story itself. I have named my talk about it after the one item in it which has caused the greatest comment. But that is only one item. The whole story is

something as follows: Moses was dead, Joshua had taken his place. Under his leadership the people had gone into Palestine. They had taken Jericho and a few other towns. There was a town named Gibeon whose inhabitants saved themselves by making peace with Joshua. Five other towns near by had each a king. Not much of a king, I suppose; more like the mayor of San Pedro or El Monte, for the towns were little towns. But those five kings got together. They were provoked that Gibeon had gone over to Joshua, and proposed to make war. Why not on Joshua directly, does not appear. That would have been much more to the point. If they conquered Gibeon, that would not stop Joshua. But anyway they made war against Gibeon. The Gibeonites sent word to Joshua. Joshua got his men together and made a night march and a surprise attack upon the five kings. Jehovah had assured him in advance, "I have delivered them into your hands." So it proved. Jehovah "discomfited them," as the stately English of the King James Version puts it; threw them into a panic as we should say. The five kings and their armies ran before Joshua's surprise attack. As they were running Jehovah threw down stones upon them, "great stones from heaven," so that more were killed by the hailstones than by Joshua's army.

Then Joshua said, "Oh sun, stand still over Gibeon. Move not, O moon from Ajalon vale. The sun stood still; the moon moved not; till the folk had taken vengeance on their foes." The author adds that he quotes this poem from the Book of Jashar.

"Jashar" means "righteous." The Book of Jashar was apparently a book of songs celebrating the deeds of great heroes.

We have another quotation from it in Second Samuel, the dirge of David for Saul and Jonathan. So evidently the book was not written till Saul and Jonathan were dead. We have still another in First Kings, a little utterance of Solomon at the time of the dedication of the temple. Evidently, then, it was written after that. Whoever wrote this story about Joshua, then, wrote it after Solomon built his temple. Joshua had been dead for three hundred years.

The author evidently realizes that he has narrated an unusual event. He repeats it: "So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven and hasted not to go down about a whole day"; and then adds, "There was never a day like that before or since." He knew he was telling something out of the ordinary.

But how far out of the ordinary he did not know. Our modern idea of the heavens and of the movement of bodies through them is only a few hundred years old. Ancient peoples did not of course picture the earth as going around the sun. They pictured it as flat and at the center of the universe. The sun was a light which came up when it was time for people to get up and went down when it was time for them to stop for the day. As the Book of Genesis says, "God made two great lights, the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night." With our understanding, if the earth stood still for twenty-four hours, everything else would have to stand still with it; else one thing would catch up with and run into another and we should have the heavens badly cluttered up. But the ancient historian did not intend to say that Jehovah stopped the whole physical universe for a day. Nothing so stupendous as that. He just stopped the sun, hung the big lantern up to some

celestial lamp-post for twenty-four hours and then took it down and let it go on as usual.

And he did this, notice, so that Joshua and Israel should have ample time to give their enemies a better beating. And they did. Then they went back to camp at Gilgal.

The five kings had not been killed, either by the army or the hailstones. They had deserted their men and hidden in a cave. Not a very good place to hide. More like a trap than anything else. Pin them in there, said Joshua, roll some big stones in front of the door and put a few men to guard it, then go on and finish your enemies; the kings can wait.

So they did. Then, said Joshua, bring out the kings. They bound them I suppose; for Joshua called his captains and said, "Put your feet upon their necks," and they did. This ceremony over, Joshua killed them. We hang men to kill them, but Joshua killed his men first and hanged them afterwards, each one on a separate tree, for people to look at I suppose, to put heart into them for the next enterprise they might have. When the sun went down — it went down as usual that day — they took the five kings down, threw them into the cave where they had hidden and rolled the big stones back where they had been. And there, says the author, they are to this day. So endeth the story of what happened when the sun stood still.

Some things that one would naturally say about this old story I said in the beginning. Some others I will say now. To one accustomed to read the Old Testament in the light of modern knowledge it seems strange that until recently people felt that they had to take such stories as literal history. To take them any other way was to doubt the Word of God. It was a sort of impiety. They might seem strange

to you, some parts of them impossible and others even offensive. But there they were. There was nothing to do but take them.

If you ask me what I think about this story as history, I do not think that any history written three or four hundred years after the event, without any documents coming from the time itself, just depending upon stories passed from mouth to mouth over a period of ten generations, is, as history, of any particular account. I think you can believe what part of it looks likely to you and forget the rest. We have come to see — it is astonishing how long it took us to see it — that between the truth of an ancient story like this and the living of a Christian life today there is absolutely no connection. Except, of course, that to take an ancient story like this for literal history may make it more difficult to be a Christian.

The Old Testament is in its historical parts a pretty bloody book. It came out of bloody times. But the time was not always as bloody as the later account of it. The Book of Joshua records many other exploits of that great and good man. He killed off practically all the inhabitants of the land — men, women and children. But you needn't feel too bad about that. For when you come to the Book of Judges, which follows the Book of Joshua, there they are, alive and well, and the Israelites have to conquer them tribe by tribe and settle down and live among them as best they can. Perhaps even the story of the five kings was elaborated in the three centuries between the events and the time of their writing. This is one point among many at which the modern knowledge of the Bible affords us a spiritual relief. We should thank God for it.

But what I thought, as I read this old story over the other

day, was how much killing there has been in the world, how much useless, superfluous, unnecessary killing. The armies of these kings had been conquered. The few men that were left of them had crept back into their miserable towns. The five kings were about as harmless as five kittens. Why not bring them out and tell them to "beat it"? Why kill them and hang them up on trees?

It is not only pacifist preachers who occasionally ask such questions. I remember a colonel in the regular army whom I knew in France. He was a very gentle and devout man, and seemed to spend most of his time off duty reading the Bible. He said to me one day when I caught him at this occupation, "I hope when we get to heaven we will be done with this killing business." I hope so too. I hope we shall get done with it sometime on earth. And I believe we shall. But evidently not for a good while yet. Killing is still a considerable part of the business of men on the earth.

But we have made great progress. I have often said to you that the central and controlling idea in religion is the idea of God. What you think about him determines what you think about everything else. In ancient times each people had its own god. Jehovah was the god of the Israelites. He was not, in Joshua's time, the god of any other tribe, much less of the whole earth. It is often said that he was a god of war; and so he was. Jahweh of hosts was one of his names, i.e., the lord of armies. But he was no more the god of war than was the god of every other tribe. For each people had its own god and every god his own people. When a tribe made war its god was on its side. Where else would he be? He had no interest in any people except his own. We try to keep up this idea in modern times. In the

midst of a war we succeed pretty well at it. We usually convince ourselves that God is on our side. But there is only one God now. He is the God of the people on the other side as well. That makes it much more difficult. And sometime it will make it impossible.

Slow, slow, how terribly slow, is that process which we see at work in the Bible, but which is yet far from complete; the tendency, namely, to think of God as equally interested in all peoples and all people everywhere, and as being in his nature not cruel nor harsh nor vindictive, but loving and gentle and kind. Why is it so slow? I suppose because we are ourselves so slow to be gentle and kindly. But we have got at least this far; if you should ever dream that God stops the sun, you would have him stop it, not that somebody should have more time to kill more people, but that some human hand should be enabled to alleviate more perfectly some human distress.

Finally, the real hope of the world is that the sun never does stand still — neither the sun nor human history nor the thoughts of men, nor anything else. When once an idea that has the seeds of peace and happiness in it gets planted in the human heart war may cut it back for a little, and hatred may dwarf it for the moment in individual hearts; but it will grow. So Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which is very small at first but which grows into the greatest of herbs, so that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches.

So may it grow, this little conception of the goodness of God, so tiny at the start, so slow to take root in the soil of our hard hearts, but planted there at last and tended fondly by every pure soul and gentle spirit that appears among us; let

it grow till it fills the earth, and beneath the shadow of it human hate and cruelty slink away ashamed.

My second illustration is called

THE SHADOW ON THE DIAL

And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, what shall be the sign that Jehovah will heal me and that I shall go up to the house of Jehovah the third day? And Isaiah said, This shall be the sign unto thee; shall the shadow go forward ten steps or shall it go back ten steps? And Hezekiah answered, It is an easy thing for the shadow to decline ten steps; but let it return backward ten steps. And Isaiah cried unto Jehovah; and he brought the shadow ten steps backward, from where it had gone down on the dial of Hezekiah.

II Kings 20:8-11.

This sermon, which began in a study of the events from which it takes its name, has developed into something else. It begins with a consideration of certain events recorded in the Second Book of Kings, ends with a consideration of some conditions of the present day, and takes up several other things on the way. But I still call it, perhaps ineptly, "The Shadow on the Dial."

If I were Jonathan Edwards, preaching to the congregation in Northampton in 1732, everybody would know what I meant by "the shadow on the dial." They would know I could not be referring to anything but the unique performance of the shadow on the famous dial of King Hezekiah, on or around the year 700 B.C. Weak on psychoanalysis and behaviorism, they did know the Old Testament. Since we are fallen upon other (let us hope better) times, perhaps I had better tell you who Hezekiah was, and what led up to the famous performance of the shadow.

Hezekiah was king in Jerusalem about the end of the seventh century B.C. His father had been king before him, and had become a vassal of Assyria. Hezekiah was a 100 per cent patriot and refused to pay the tribute his father had agreed upon. The king of Assyria came up and took some forty of Hezekiah's towns and carried off a couple of hundred thousand of his subjects. Hezekiah sent an apology to the Assyrian king. "Name your price," he said, "and I will pay it; only go away and let me alone."

Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, named his price. Hezekiah took the family jewels, the silver from the temple, the gold from the temple doors and pillars, and sent it all to Sennacherib. Sennacherib took it and came right on toward Jerusalem. Hezekiah had been playing with Egypt — thought he might get horses there for his soldiers, but Sennacherib ridiculed that. "Egypt is a broken reed," he said. "I will give you two thousand horses myself, if you have that many men to put onto them." It was only a bluff; but it showed that he knew his ground. They didn't have two thousand men to put on that many horses.

Hezekiah rent his clothes and went into the temple. The temple was no great sight, just then. The roof of one part of it was missing. The bronze oxen were gone, his own father had sent them to the king of Assyria long ago. He himself had taken the silver from the treasury and peeled the gold from the doors and the pillars; it must have been a desolate looking place. But I hope Hezekiah felt better when he got inside.

None too good, evidently. For he did another thing. He did not care to trust himself in the hand of God without a little help. So he sent for Isaiah the prophet. No king ever

took the advice of any prophet. But when any king was in trouble he always wanted a prophet around. The prophet knew what God was likely to do. More than that, he had a sort of inside hold on God, and God was likely to do what the prophet asked him to. The state of mind he was in when he sent for Isaiah appears from his message. "This is a day of trouble," he said, "and of rebuke and of blasphemy. The children are come to birth and there is not strength to bring forth." A terrible situation, indeed.

Isaiah came, and he was full of a strange assurance. He said it was nothing. It would pass. And for some strange reason it did. The sacred writer says, in his quaint way: "The angel of Jehovah went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." Some sort of an epidemic, perhaps. Sennacherib went back to Nineveh, and Hezekiah heard with much relief that two of his sons had murdered him.

But it was a narrow escape. And immediately after that, Hezekiah was sick. Isaiah came to see him — for in ancient society the priest or the prophet was also the doctor. He did not show much more tact than some modern doctors. "Set your house in order; you are going to die," was his cheerful message. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall. Before he died, he would breathe a brief prayer. And so he did. And wept, much. Isaiah left. But before he had reached the middle of the city he turned back. His former word was the word of the Lord, he said. But now he had another and a better one. "Go back and tell Hezekiah," the Lord said to him, "that I have heard his prayer, and seen his tears, and I will heal him. In three days he will be well, and able to

go to the temple again." Then he ordered a fig poultice for him.

Hezekiah naturally thought it was too good to be true, and wanted a sign. All right, said Isaiah, "the shadow on the sun dial, will you have it move forward, or backwards?" Hezekiah thought it would be harder and more wonderful to make it move backwards. So Isaiah did; moved it backwards ten degrees.

Hezekiah got well. But he did not get back all his good sense. When some messengers came to him from the king of Babylon he showed them through the palace and all around the town. Isaiah was provoked at this, and prophesied that his sons would be carried captive to Babylon. Hezekiah thought about this prophecy and said: "Well, there will be peace in my time, anyhow."

Now about this shadow on the dial:

How could Isaiah move it back ten degrees? He could not, of course; that is, not unless he could not merely stop the sun, as Joshua did, but make it travel for a while from west to east. Not unless he could make the earth stop whirling in one direction, and make it whirl in the other. What he had to do was to make it eight o'clock in the morning when it was really six o'clock in the afternoon. He had to take a slice out of time. Not so easy. Not when you know, as we do these days, something about the solar system, and how the earth is hitched up with the rest of it, and what forces are involved in such a performance. People have often wondered about Joshua's stopping the sun. But this little miracle, really much bigger, slipped in here in a couple of verses as if it were nothing at all, has attracted but little attention.

Why did such a thing appear so simple and easy to people

2500 years ago? Turn back to the Book of Genesis and you will see. "And God made two great lights," the story reads, "the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night." That is what the sun was, to the ancient Hebrew. Not the center of a system, not the source of all the heat and light and power in that system, but just a lantern hung out in the sky so that people could find their way around on the earth. If God wanted to swing it back and forth for a moment, now I ask you, why not? Why should anybody still take literally what people said about the physical universe when they did not yet know anything about it? And how shall we ever be rid of trouble with the Bible so long as we do? The whole solar system never went into reverse just to give a sick man a sign that he was going to get well.

But that brings up another question: If you begin to distinguish in the Bible between the things you will believe and the things you will not, how will you know where to stop? By the use of your common sense. I do not have to doubt the whole story of George Washington because the story of the cherry tree no longer stands. That Hezekiah had a boil, that in the state of mind into which his affairs had plunged him he thought he was going to die of it, but that with a little encouragement from the prophet and the application of a poultice he was able to be up and out again in three days, is one thing, and one kind of thing. That the solar system reversed itself to assure him that he would get well is quite another thing. One who cannot distinguish between the two ought not to be trusted with a book like the Bible.

In the next place, how did the prophet get those convictions of his — "hunches" we should call them these days — about what was going to happen? I do not know. The time is too

far away, the prophet said too little about the working of his own mind. But this story has some interesting things in it on that point. First, Isaiah said Hezekiah was going to die, the Lord had told him that. Then he said he was going to get well, the Lord had told him that. Had the Lord changed his mind? It is simpler to think that Isaiah had changed his.

And Isaiah was not always right. He said Hezekiah's sons would be carried into Babylon. And they were not. One of them reigned for fifty-one years, and died peacefully in his own bed and was buried in his own garden. And his son reigned after him. In our preoccupation with the marvelous we have found many predictions in the Bible which are not there. Of the actual predictions probably as many failed as proved correct. The old idea of a prophet as a man to whom God had unrolled the scroll of the future, goes by the board as soon as you begin to study any particular part of the Old Testament.

The prophet was a combination of preacher, moral reformer and practical politician. He believed in righteousness, personal and national. Because things were wrong now, he foresaw that worse things were likely to follow. He was sure that if people would do right things would come out well. So he threatened and he promised, as all reformers and prophets always do. Sometimes he was right. Sometimes he was wrong. It happens to all men who try to dip into the future for practical purposes. When Mr. Hoover during his presidential campaign said: "We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of the land. The poorhouse is vanishing from among us. We have not yet reached the goal, but, given

a chance to go forward with the policies of the last eight years, we shall soon, with the help of God, be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation," he didn't hit it quite right. But he came as near it as Isaiah did about the sons of Hezekiah.

Prediction is a dangerous business. The ancient prophet apparently did what the modern one does. He watched the course of events. He guessed at the future from the present. In his mind he always added, as Mr. Hoover did, "With the help of God." When he came out right, then he knew that God was with him. When he did not, he must have felt as do all prophets who have a similar experience.

But a better word is to be said of the prophet, ancient or modern, than this. What he was (and if he is a true prophet, still is) interested in, was not to see his predictions come true. When they were predictions of evil, he hoped they would not come true. That is what he made them for — so that people would reform and escape them. What he cared about was the state of affairs and the welfare of the people in his own time. He believed in religion as the clue to social and political success. But he believed in the right kind of religion. In these very days of Hezekiah, the prophet found the people full of religion. But it didn't cheer him up a bit. It was the wrong kind. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me," he makes Jehovah say. "I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts. Your new moons and your feasts and sabbaths are a trouble to me. I am weary to bear them." What was the trouble then? It was that the nation was full of practical ungodliness. "Your princes," he says, "are the companions of thieves; they love bribes; they follow after a reward; they judge not the father-

less, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them." And what was the remedy? Just practical godliness. "Your hands are full of blood," he says. "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil; learn to do well. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

I do not attempt to say whether there is as much practical ungodliness to the square mile in America today as there used to be in Jerusalem. But there is plenty. And there is no other prescription for it than that which the prophet was accustomed to give. I have read somewhere, in a passage which I cannot identify, that about 1850 a subtle change seems to have come over the political ideals of America. The 'forties were days of moral struggle and idealism. Freedom, equality, brotherhood, justice, were the watchwords. There was much searching of heart, much repentance for national sins, much aspiration for a better type of life among the people. But about 1850 these old watchwords disappeared from party platforms and the speech of candidates. In their place stood one simple, magic word, "prosperity." The slogan was "The Full Dinner Pail." The one concern of each party was to prove that it could fill the pail fuller than the other party. In the last national election there were other issues, as prohibition, the personality of the candidates. But one issue alone decided it. We voted for the party we thought would give us prosperity.

But prosperity is a by-product. As with any by-product, when you seek for it for itself and not as a by-product of other and better things, you ruin the business. When people have a fair chance, when you get rid of favoritism and privilege, when you have wholesome ideals of home and family

life, when the rewards of industry are fairly distributed, when the law is as good a friend to the poor man as it is to the rich, when you get liberty and justice, then, whether people on the whole have less money or more than they had before, you have the only kind of prosperity that is worth having. But what kind you get when you seek prosperity and nothing deeper or better, is clear from the record of the last ten years. A radio in everybody's house, an automobile in everybody's garage, and on the side, mixed drinking and free talk, Al Capone, gangdom, bootleggers, and the jails all overcrowded; then plunging and speculation and financial hysteria and a final crash—that is how we go when we keep our eye on nothing higher than prosperity.

There is no easy way out of our difficulties. Justice, truth, plain living, equality, freedom, honesty in high places and in low, are never easily won. But they are never won unless they are aimed at. No prophet stands by to turn the shadow on the dial back for us. But the word of the ancient wise man still stands and points the only, if not the easy, way out: "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

PART TWO

THE NEW TESTAMENT



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GOSPELS

IT IS NOT required or expected that ordinary Christians should become biblical critics. If they can get some insight into what sort of book the Bible really is, and into the methods by which biblical scholars have arrived at some of the more general and more significant of their conclusions, that is quite enough. If they do not know that that is what they are doing, so much the better, for it indicates that the minister has been preaching to them, not lecturing. Instruction that comes to us by the way is often better than that which we get consciously and by effort. The part of the Bible which most readily lends itself to the conveying of this instruction is the Old Testament. I have for this reason given more space and attention to it than to the New.

The New Testament, vastly more than the Old, is the source of the preacher's ethical and spiritual teaching. The greater and more important part of it, like the teachings of Jesus or of Paul, is wholly independent of all questions of date, authorship or historical accuracy. It stands in its own right. There are, however, some sections in the New Testament which throw light upon the origin and development of that book and a knowledge of which gives people a truer and more human point of view concerning it.

Most people, for instance, draw little if any distinction among the four Gospels. The beginning of any genuine

understanding of the New Testament is the distinction between the Gospel of John on the one hand and the three Synoptic Gospels on the other. It has seemed to me that the time is not yet ripe, the matter is too complicated or technical, and the love, amounting almost to veneration, of the people for passages from the Fourth Gospel too great, to make it spiritually profitable for the minister to attempt too much education of his people in this item.

Some small things he can do incidentally in this direction whose results may not be altogether lost upon the discerning. Preaching upon some parable in the Synoptics, he may remark upon the singular fact that there are no parables in the Fourth Gospel. He may call attention to how strange this is, in view of the statement in the Synoptics that Jesus habitually taught in parables. Or he may preach upon some event in the life of Jesus recorded in the Fourth Gospel and not in the Synoptics, and mention this difference in the accounts. Or preaching upon any short, pithy saying of Jesus such as make up so large a part of the Sermon on the Mount, he may mention the fact that we have almost no sayings of this sort in the Gospel of John. Or he may mention the significant fact that not only the speeches in the Fourth Gospel but the length of Jesus' ministry and the local setting of it are different from those in the Synoptics.

Such little things he may do without offense, and they may set some few of his people to observing on their own account some of the more marked and significant differences between John and the Synoptics. But something like this still seems to me about as far as the preacher can go in this matter, so fundamental for New Testament scholarship. After all, he is not a theological professor but a preacher, and

while he should be a teaching preacher his teaching is altogether secondary to his preaching. He preaches not to show off his learning, even his biblical learning, but to do his people good. He does them good, to be sure, by making them more intelligent or better informed. But there is a point at which he will ask himself whether he is giving them information at the expense of something which is more important to them.

Yet there are in the Gospels some passages about which a preacher may well preach for the sake of their obvious moral and spiritual content, and which, without lessening that value but as introductory to the exposition of it, afford excellent and simple lessons as to how the New Testament grew up.

One of the simplest of these is in the Gospel of John (John 5:1-9). It is the little story of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. I remember a statement of Washington Gladden, of how the New England ministers expressed their regret that the fourth verse of the chapter should have been omitted in the Revised Version. The preachers knew well enough that this verse, concerning the angel who came down and stirred up the pool, was not in the older and better manuscripts. They were glad to know this for themselves. But they feared the consequences of allowing this knowledge to spread among the people. It might, they said, undermine people's confidence in the Bible. They need not have been worried about it. Most people who read the story in the Revised Version do not miss the verse. When I have studied the passage in class with theological students I have invariably had to call their attention to the fact that it is missing, and that it is printed in a footnote with an explanation of why it has been omitted. It is in fact one of those items that

you have to preach about if you expect people to know that it is there.

One does not, of course, preach a sermon on this passage for the sake of this item. He preaches upon it to show the plight of the poor man and the sympathy of Jesus, and to stimulate his hearers to remembrance of and compassion for the unnumbered forgotten men who throng our cities and of whom not even the smallest community is without its example. But in the process, how can he avoid mentioning the fact that the fourth verse is no longer there, and of making some brief explanation of how it got into the King James Version? When he has pointed out to people how some scribe, reading this story of the intermittent spring and thinking some explanation of its peculiar healing power should be offered, wrote in his copy the item about the angel, he has opened a little window into the process that went on in the writing of the Gospels. Some people will fail to draw any inferences or to extend what he has said about this one verse to anything beyond it. But others will perceive that some modification of older and more mechanical conceptions of the authorship of the New Testament is in order.

Among the differences distinguishing the first three Gospels, one of the most conspicuous is that of Luke's partiality for the story parable, like the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. To call attention to the fact that these parables are in Luke alone is to show that though Luke used the Gospel of Mark, and though he has much material not in Mark but common to Matthew and Luke, he also had some sources of his own. This fact, coupled with what Luke says in his preface, will give people some little idea of the literary activity that took place at the beginning of Christianity and

so start them on a more natural and human view of the New Testament. The preacher must ordinarily have an introduction of some sort to his sermon. Why not have one that adds something to the Christian knowledge of his hearers, and that they will value for itself and not merely for the fact that it gives them time to get down to the real business of listening? And what sort of introduction could there be, to a sermon on any of this material which is peculiar to Luke, better, more interesting or more informing, than something of the sort I have just indicated?

An appreciation of any one of the Synoptic Gospels as regards the differences between it and the other two is a distinct advance for most Christian people. Speaking still of the Gospel of Luke, all students of the New Testament recognize its humanitarian interest as distinctive of it. What is easier, when preaching on the beatitudes, than to call attention to the differences between Matthew's list and that of Luke? Or there are those little fragments of historical or narrative matter which Luke alone has preserved for us; the items, namely, of Mary and Martha, the blessing of the unknown woman upon the mother of Jesus, the healing of the crippled woman, the women who followed Jesus and ministered to his needs, the raising of the widow's son, and the address of Jesus to the women on his way to the cross. Outside of his introductory chapters and his passion and post-resurrection narrative, these six little items constitute practically his entire personal contribution to the narrative of Jesus' life.

I have sometimes asked a class what these six fragments have in common, and they have looked so hard and so deep for it that they have not seen it. It is of course the simple

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fact that they all have to do with women. Preaching about any one of these items—and each one of them is in itself very well worth preaching about—what is easier than to mention the fact that these six fragments, though scattered through Luke's Gospel, are bound together by this common element of content and thus indicate either one characteristic of Luke's special source, or more probably one of his own dominant interests? The Gospel of Luke has indeed often been called "the widows' gospel." It deserves a more inclusive description than that. It is the gospel of poor folks, too many of whom in Jesus' time were women; the gospel of outcasts and down-and-outers.

The preacher, to be sure, may preach a sermon on the Gospel of Luke. He may say, "I will now show you how the Gospel of Luke differs from the Gospel of Matthew or of Mark." And he may proceed to show them. But the result will be that, being a lecture rather than a sermon, it will not go home as it should to those who hear it, that many will be among those absent on that day and will not hear it at all, and that many of those who do hear it will forget it. But if on various Sundays, as he preaches on something which is in the Gospel of Luke and not in the others, he will speak of what sort of material it is, it will gradually and by repetition soak into the minds of his hearers that the Gospel of Luke is not just like the others but has a flavor of its own. That is at least a beginning of a more intelligent appreciation of the Gospels.

It is well known among biblical scholars, but not yet suspected by the Christian public, that there is almost nothing in the Gospel of Mark which is not in Matthew or Luke or both. But there is one little parable which Mark has re-

corded which neither Matthew nor Luke thought it worth while to copy. It is that of the seed that grew of itself (Mark 4:26-29). The parable itself is suggestive. There is a power in nature and in man that works from within. What that power is, and why a man should never be discouraged, because it is still and always there and at work, is a great truth to be gleaned from this little parable, and hardly so obviously from any other. But even if the same material were to be found in many New Testament passages, it would be worth while to preach on this particular parable because of the chance it gives the preacher to speak of the dependence of Matthew and Luke upon Mark, and the manner of their treatment of him. No single sermon produces, in this matter of education regarding the New Testament, any very important result. But many such sermons, scattered over a period of months and years, will re-educate a congregation as to what sort of book the New Testament is.

Among the changes which Matthew and Luke have made in the material they have taken from Mark is the displacement of some of it from the position which it held in Mark. Luke is the conscious literary artist. He seldom or never tells a story of Mark's without improving it. But he also changes the order of Mark's narrative where it suits his purpose to do so. Once in a while this gets him into anachronisms which he does not perceive. In Mark's sixth chapter, well along toward the middle of his Gospel, occurs the story of Jesus' preaching in his home town. Matthew has the same story in his thirteenth chapter, thus giving it approximately the same place in the life of Jesus which it holds in the Gospel of Mark. For some reason that need not be dis-

cussed here, Luke has transposed this to a much earlier period in Jesus' public ministry. Indeed he puts it at the beginning, immediately after the temptation. Jesus preaches in the synagogue at Nazareth. The people listen for a while with interest, and then grow skeptical. They say to Jesus, "Let us see some of the miracles here which you have been doing in Capernaum."

But according to Luke's own account Jesus has not been in Capernaum. He has come straight from his temptation to Nazareth. With the story where it is in Mark and Matthew, this request of the people is entirely natural. According to their accounts such works have been done in Capernaum. Luke transfers the story to the new location without perceiving the inconsistency of the people's question under the changed circumstances. This is a little item by itself. But it is an item that throws light on the habits of at least one of the Synoptic writers. I remember preaching a sermon on it at one time; and whatever else there was in the sermon I am sure it was not rendered any worse by the fact that I brought out this trait in the writing of Luke.

Among New Testament passages that illustrate the growth of the Gospels, one of the simplest and the most thoroughly human is the case of the ambitious disciples. The events are recorded in the tenth chapter of Mark and the twentieth chapter of Matthew. For a sermon on such a text there still is and always will be ample occasion. What is the place of ambition in the Christian life? Is an unambitious Christian, even an unambitious minister, worth much? Is religion all renunciation, or is it also and quite as properly desire, emulation, ambition? If ambition has its place in the Christian life, what is the Christian man, or more specifically the

Christian minister, to be ambitious for? A bigger church in a bigger town with a bigger salary, or more knowledge, more usefulness, and a greater service to be rendered? Clearly here is a subject that "comes home to men's business and bosoms," as Bacon said. There is plenty here to preach about that is central to Christian ethics.

But incidentally, naturally by way of introduction, is it not worth observing that Matthew is here dependent upon Mark, as in so large a part of his Gospel, but that he has changed this story in a quite remarkable way? Mark says that James and John came to Jesus; and like two children asking their father for something, tried to get him to promise in advance to give them what they were going to ask for. Jesus preferred to find out what they wanted, before he promised. It was well that he did so. For they wanted the two best seats in the Kingdom of God, one at his right hand, the other at his left. Jesus asked the two men if they were able and willing to go to the end with him, and they said they were. Jesus replied that they should be allowed to do this; but who should have the best seats in the Kingdom was not at his disposal. When the other disciples heard of this request of the two, they were naturally indignant.

This interesting story Matthew tells almost word for word with Mark. Except at one significant point. He says it was not James and John who made this selfish request; it was their mother! A decided improvement in the story without doubt. What boys may not ask for themselves their mother may properly ask for them. If anyone says, "Probably it was their mother; the story runs that way as well as the other," the reply is that it does not. For Matthew should have changed the story a little more if he was going to

change it at all. He has not covered his tracks. For in his story as well as in Mark's the indignation of the other disciples is directed not against the mother of the men — against her there would have been no cause for indignation — but against the men themselves. Is there any harm in letting people know that Matthew thus tried to save the reputation of two of the disciples and almost succeeded in doing so? Is it not a commentary on the growing veneration in which the disciples were held in the early church, and quite aside from that, is not Matthew's effort a distinct addition to an already significant human story?

In the Gospel of Luke occurs the little parable of the unjust, or the reluctant, judge. It is the first eight verses of his eighteenth chapter. Who can have read this parable without wondering about the eighth verse? The verse reads: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?" Why should Jesus, at this comparatively early period in his public career, before any notable controversy had developed or he had reason to expect any speedy or untoward end to his career, refer so clearly to his second coming, and express a doubt whether his followers would remain faithful to him till that event? The question is indeed hard to answer.

But if this eighth verse be considered, not as part of the parable itself, but as the comment of Luke upon the parable, everything is clear. In that case the verse ceases to be a strange and meaningless question. In the mouth of Luke, who lived when the second coming was still expected, but when it had been so long delayed that many had given up in despair and fallen away from the faith, the question is not only a real but a pathetic one, opening a window upon

the scene of uncertainty in which he lived and wrote. How many pages of how many commentators would have been saved if the gospel writers had known and used such a simple device as our modern quotation points! One does not preach a sermon on quotation points. But one does preach a sermon upon the difficulty of maintaining faith in a dark time, when hopes fondly held have been disappointed, when evil seems to be in the saddle and relief is long delayed. And if in such a sermon one can so easily transform a meaningless sentence into one that almost drips with the blood of the time in which it was written, why not do it? Why not give the discerning every possible means of escape from mechanical conceptions of the New Testament and every possible chance to draw their own deductions concerning this greatest of all books? Especially when one can do it without ceasing to preach, and can in fact preach all the more interestingly for it.

Or there is the story of the healing of the centurion's son, as told by Matthew in his eighth chapter and by Luke in his seventh. The stories run in large part word for word in the two accounts. Yet with one surprising difference. Matthew's story is that the centurion himself came to Jesus and told him about his son. Upon Jesus' saying that he would go and heal him the centurion replied that this would not be necessary; if Jesus would "speak a word only" his servant (or son) would be healed. He illustrated his feeling by saying that he also was a man under authority, and had soldiers under him, and so on.

For some reason Luke has changed the circumstances quite completely. He says the centurion did not come to Jesus, but sent messengers. The messengers reported the request

of the centurion and added their hope that Jesus would grant his request, saying that he was a great man and had built a synagogue at his own expense. When Jesus went with the messengers the centurion met him before he reached the house; and there the same conversation occurred which Matthew has reported as taking place when the centurion came in person to Jesus. In Luke the centurion went so far as to explain to Jesus why he had not come in person in the first place. I have earlier spoken of certain characteristics of Luke. Is it not worth while, in addition to showing that he was a humanitarian with a special interest in widows and the poor, that he was also the conscious literary artist who never failed to improve a story if he could?

In recent years there has appeared a type of New Testament study called "form criticism," applied particularly to the Synoptic Gospels. This type of criticism has its home in Germany, where under the leadership of Dibelius, Schmidt and Bultmann it has been carried to what look like its natural limits. It may indeed seem to some readers that these critics, as is natural to those engrossed in any new line of study, have claimed some results that may later be relinquished. However that may be, the English translation of some briefer works of these scholars has brought within the purview of American preachers a somewhat disturbing attitude toward the teaching, and thus inevitably toward the historic career, of Jesus.

I am not sure how much of the results of this most recent study of the Gospels lends itself to use in the pulpit. I have been concerned in this discussion to show what can be done with such biblical knowledge as is the common property of educated ministers, rather than to introduce new and per-

plexing problems. I was therefore at first disposed to omit any consideration of this newer study of the Gospels. But younger generations of preachers, or at least the youngest generation of them, will already have been introduced to this procedure, and a knowledge of form criticism will soon become more general among all studious preachers. In that event many preachers may find themselves in difficulty about the use of sayings which the Gospels attribute to Jesus, and of some of the deeds he is said to have done. For this later Gospel criticism ascribes some, or even many, of these, not to Jesus but to the evangelist or the tradition of the early church. Must the preacher, in view of such uncertainty as I have just mentioned, forego the old familiar expression, "as Jesus said," lest he should quote something from Jesus which was really said by Matthew or Mark? Must he avoid saying "as Jesus did," for fear of ascribing to Jesus some act which he did not do but which was attributed to him by the early church?

One should not make this situation more acute for oneself than it needs in conscience to be. "Jesus" means to us Jesus as we have him in the Gospels. When one quotes from the *Phaedo* a saying of Echecrates, he does not say, "as Echecrates says; or I should say as Plato said; for Plato wrote all the speeches for all his characters." He just says, "as Echecrates said," and lets it go at that. If one were to be too particular he could hardly quote a word from Socrates without stopping to explain that he is really quoting from Plato. This, for the purpose for which he uses his quotation, is merely time and attention wasted and serves no end whatever.

I do not know whether Jesus said, "Ye shall know the

truth and the truth shall make you free." It is in the Gospel of John; it is unlike anything Jesus is reported as saying in the Synoptic Gospels. The context gives it an application which, if we take our picture of Jesus from the Synoptic Gospels, is not likely to have been in Jesus' mind. These things make it suspect, as a saying that goes back to Jesus. But I suppose one may here apply a little common sense. If one feels doubtful about the saying, or thinks it should more properly be ascribed to John than to Jesus, one cannot, of course, base any argument upon it which would depend upon Jesus' having said it, or say anything about it that would be invalidated if it goes back to John instead of to Jesus. But if he wants to quote it in an ordinary manner, I do not see why it is any more reprehensible to quote it from Jesus than it is to quote what Cebes says in the *Phaedo* as coming from Cebes. If I wish to quote from one of the speeches of Peter in the Book of Acts, I do not feel under obligation to explain that it was probably written by the author of that book rather than by Peter. I just quote it and say, "as Peter says in the Book of Acts."

Concerning some of the choicest sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John, such as "Ye must be born again," "God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," I should feel this same way. I think I should usually say, "as Jesus says in the Gospel of John"; and if anybody wanted to ask me why I added the last phrase I would tell him. But I wouldn't, as a matter of art in public speaking, make a point of explaining, every time I quoted a saying from the Johannine Jesus, that there is always some question as to the sayings of Jesus as reported by John; no more than I would stop, every time I used the word God,

to say, "You must understand that you probably don't mean by 'God' exactly what I do." As a character in the Book of John, Jesus does say these things, just as in the Phaedo, Echecrates and Cebes do say what is there attributed to them. I am not making a plea for evasion or intellectual dishonesty. If any preacher feels that his conscience will not permit him to go this far, let him stop short of it at whatever point he will. But personally I do not see why a man should stand up so straight about little matters of this kind that he falls over backward.

This simple principle, however, will not help the preacher where words are ascribed to Jesus which he feels misrepresent him or contradict the clear purport of his teaching. If, for instance, I think Jesus did not expect his own return upon the clouds of glory within the lifetime of his own generation, I obviously cannot quote Jesus as saying that he did expect this. If I think Jesus did not foresee his resurrection but that references to it in his sayings come from the evangelist or the early church, I will have to treat them accordingly or not at all. There may be many things which at the present time it is not expedient to treat from the pulpit; not because the minister is afraid of them or wishes to misrepresent his position upon them, but because to treat them adequately would turn the pulpit into a classroom and interfere with the preacher's main task without accomplishing any compensating good. Such things as I have just spoken of may be among those. This depends upon the preacher, upon what he wants to accomplish and how much skill he has in accomplishing it. But he is certainly at liberty to remember that he is not a New Testament professor but a preacher. There are many things that a preacher should know about

the Gospels which will influence his total conception of Jesus but not all of which can profitably be set out before a congregation. What one cannot do, of course, if one is to save his own soul — an aim never to be entirely relinquished — is to say anything about Jesus or his teaching which is inconsistent with what one believes to be true about them. And equally one cannot turn one's eyes away from any new learning about the New Testament, nor cling blindly to a traditional view in the hope that it will yield him more spiritual or homiletic power.

Out of certain other though still minor difficulties the preacher is helped (I have said this in another connection) by simply remembering the difference between an ancient book and a modern one. When Mark (Mark 14:9) tells his story of the anointing by the woman, makes Jesus commend her, and then says, "Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world this that she hath done shall be spoken of as a memorial of her," these last words run right along in our English text as if they were words of Jesus. The use of the word "gospel" and the reference to its being preached throughout the world, make the words more appropriate in the mouth of Mark than in that of Jesus. It is likely that Mark intended them to be so taken; only, he had no means of indicating this in his writing. In the same way the words that close the account of the walk through the corn (Mark 2:28), "therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath," appear to us like words of Jesus. But in the mouth of Jesus they are a *non sequitur*. They are probably the words of Mark or of the source from which he got his story.

If the preacher has observed these instances and others like them, and feels as I have just expressed myself about them;

and if he wants to preach on the walk through the corn, or the anointing by the woman, it should be easy for him to explain to his congregation the difference between the words of Jesus and those of the evangelist. To do so will add at once for his hearers a significance to these passages which they have never had for them. Whatever increases people's knowledge of the New Testament increases their interest in it. In all instances such as these, where the Gospel appears on the surface to ascribe to Jesus words which the evangelist probably intended as his own, and which he expected his readers so to understand, the case is easy.

There are other passages, however, from which no such easy exit is open. The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus explained all his parables to the disciples, though Mark does not in all instances include the explanation. Not only is it difficult to think of Jesus' having done this; and not only do all the parables seem to us to be without any such need for explanation; but sometimes the explanation fits poorly into the time and circumstances in which Jesus spoke, but admirably into those of the evangelist. This is true in a measure even of the explanation of the parable of the Sower (Mark 4:13-20). Not only is "the word" used in its later and semitechnical sense of the gospel, but the explanation seems to reflect a time when much preaching had been done, with varying degrees of success, some disheartening and others very encouraging. If one asks himself why Mark should have appended explanations to such parables, which seem not to need any, the reason is plainly in Mark's peculiar theory about the parables. He says that Jesus spoke in parables (Mark 4:10-12) in order that people generally might not understand, but that the disciples might get the teaching

intended for them. To be sure that they did get it, when they told him they had not understood it, Jesus added the explanation.

If one asks why Mark should have had such a theory about the parables, which their character is so far from bearing out, this again is part of Mark's explanation, which was that of the early church, as to why Jesus had been misunderstood and rejected by his own people. To explain this was one great task of the early apologetic, and the Synoptic Gospels betray traces of it in many places. To try to indoctrinate a congregation about this theory of Mark's and its results in the interpretations that follow upon the parables is a proceeding for the schoolroom, not for the pulpit. Especially, no young preacher who has just recently heard about it himself, and whose congregation has none too absolute a confidence in his judgment or his scholarship, should attempt such a thing. And no preacher of any sort should attempt it except as it comes naturally and almost inevitably into the consideration of some passage from which he wishes to preach. All lugged-in stuff is bad in sermons; but worst of all, the lugged-in stuff that people don't like. But on the other hand I do not see why a preacher whose position is sufficiently established with his congregation, preaching on the parable of the Sower, should not disown the interpretation of it as part of the teaching of Jesus. Indeed the absence of any such discrimination between the parables and their interpretation, in the mind of even educated laymen, indicates how little use has been made of New Testament critical material in the pulpit. For it is now twenty-five years ago that Julicher in his *Gleichnisreden Jesu* maintained and justified the thesis that all the interpretations come from the

evangelist or the early tradition and not from Jesus. It can hardly be charged that we ministers have been over-hasty in the matter.

Where we are faced by the fact that the evangelist distinctly attributes the interpretations to Jesus, one fruitful way of teaching is to say what one feels reasonably sure is true, and then leave it to raise such questions as it will in the minds of one's hearers. Some listeners, hearing the preacher say that the parable goes back to Jesus (and I do not myself see any good reason for ascribing it to anyone else) but the interpretation to the evangelist, will draw their own conclusions. Some will raise the question of how this could have happened. And some, alas, will neither raise any questions nor draw any conclusions. They will hardly even notice it. But for such as do raise questions, the way is thus opened for a sermon on conditions and trends in the early church — call it after the title of Dr. Easton's book, *The Gospel Before the Gospels* — which in the hands of the right preacher may be made both informative and spiritually stimulating.

This matter of the parables and their interpretation is not more important than others. But it furnishes one of the simplest clues to the distinction between the actual words of Jesus and words that have been fictitiously ascribed to him. The parables of Jesus, moreover, offer the preacher perennial homiletic material of the best sort. And sometimes this material is marred for him by the explanation given for it in the Gospels — which is often not the meaning the parable seems to him naturally to bear. For these reasons I may be permitted to go a little further with this discussion.

Sometimes the interpretation of a parable is so obviously

inferior to the parable itself that one welcomes the chance to ascribe it to someone other than to Jesus. A good illustration is found in Mark's Gospel (Mark 7:17-23). Jesus has said that it is not what enters into a man but what comes out of him that makes him good or bad. The saying needs no explanation. What goes into a man's mouth is food or drink, material things without moral quality of better or worse. What comes out of his mouth is speech, ideals, thoughts, spiritual things that are necessarily either good or bad, and that indicate the character of the man. So the saying would be understood by anyone. It is hardly capable of misunderstanding and would be much better left to itself. But upon Mark's theory that the parables are dark sayings designed rather to hide than to reveal the truth, this parable requires explanation like the rest. So Mark says that when Jesus and the disciples were alone the disciples asked for an explanation, and Jesus explained that food does not go into the heart but only into the bowels and thence into the privy. He then makes Jesus repeat that what comes out of the man defiles him, and to specify as among the things that come out and defile him, evil conversation, adultery and so forth. The explanation adds no spiritual meaning which the hearer would not have understood from the first; and what is added is not particularly edifying.

In other instances it would be too much to say that the interpretation goes far toward spoiling the parable. But it does tend to weaken it by giving it a restricted meaning which standing by itself it would not have. The little parable about the tares in the wheat (Matt. 13:24-30) contains an item which raises some question about the parable itself. It is that of the enemy who came at night and sowed tares in the

field. This appears a rather unusual and laborious method of doing an injury, considering how many simpler methods are open. But when Jesus, in reply to a question about his meaning (Matt. 13:36-43), says that the sower is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed are the sons of the Kingdom, the enemy who sows the tares is the devil, the harvest is the end of the world and the reapers are the angels, we seem transported from the time of Jesus into that of the evangelist. When one observes (Matt. 13:41) that "the Kingdom" is also referred to not as the Kingdom of God but the Kingdom of the Son of Man, one feels reasonably sure that the explanation of the parable should be attributed to the writer of the Gospel. He may also feel that the original parable, doubtless spoken by Jesus, has been remodeled in the item of the devil who sowed the tares. The explanation reflects a time when there were unworthy members in the church, and when the question of whether to excommunicate them or let them remain till the parousia was a vital one. Matthew has transformed the parable into an allegory. He has thus considerably reduced its general applicability and suggestiveness as it stands by itself.

If one will compare the parables which are explained with those that are not interpreted, as Mark's little parable about the seed that grew of itself (Mark 4:26-29), or Matthew's saying about the yeast (Matt. 13:33), or Luke's parables of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep, the Prodigal Son and others, one feels that the parables generally shine much more brightly in their own light than in that of their explanation. Where the explanation adds nothing undignified or inappropriate, it makes no real explanation, since there is nothing that needed to be explained. One naturally concludes that the

explanations come not from Jesus but from the evangelist or the early church tradition.

In some instances where the explanation or application of a parable is not given privately and later to the disciples but seems to follow as part of the parable itself, it may be questioned whether the application is not part of the reflection of the evangelist rather than part of the parable. As an instance of this kind take the little parable in Matthew 13:47-50 about the fishnet. The Kingdom of Heaven, says the parable, is like a net, in which not all the fish are good; they have to be separated out. If we remember again that the gospel was preached before it was written, the words which follow, "so shall it be at the end of the world," sound more like the application of the parable to an audience, made by a preacher, than like a part of the parable itself. Quite probably the evangelist intended them so to be understood; they are a solemn warning to his readers, in view of the near approaching parousia and in the light of the parable. But since he had none of our modern devices for marking off his own words from those of Jesus, they seem to us to follow as part of the parable itself.

Not all this is closely connected with, or at least not confined to, the methods or results of form criticism, though that method of study tends to bring out many such items in a clearer light. When one begins thus to distinguish the words of Jesus from those of the evangelist, or to question whether certain words distinctly ascribed to Jesus, like the interpretations of the parables, should not in spite of this be assigned to the evangelist or to the tradition, one feels an uncertainty as to exactly what Jesus did or did not say. Where the line is to be drawn will depend upon who draws

it, upon his temperamental attitude toward such things, upon his familiarity with the methods he pursues in his study. Nor is it to be expected that in a matter of this sort there should be any very great uniformity in the judgments passed. But, to say the least, it is better to be uncertain whether Jesus said a given thing, than to be certain that he did, if it is a thing whose ideas or historical implications make it illogical or contradictory for Jesus to have said it. Nor does the preacher need to be sure of everything Jesus said, or of what he did not say, in order to preach convincingly about Jesus. The sayings of Jesus, I take it, like those of any other man, are not made true because he said them. Their truth and significance lie in themselves. But it is to be observed that the material ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels, and ascribed by form criticism to someone else, is not of a character to enrich the picture of Jesus or to unify or clarify his teaching. Indeed it is denied to Jesus and referred to someone else, precisely on the ground that this procedure renders the picture of Jesus more consistent with itself, and his teachings more consistent with his character and habits as revealed in the Gospels generally. All this would seem to be gain and not a loss, to the preacher as to the theologian.

All along here, of course, a *caveat* must be entered. The preacher is a preacher, not a theological professor. Too much of this kind of preaching, especially if unrelieved by any other kind, would seem to transform him from the former into the latter — a lamentable issue. This kind of preaching must never be done with the mere purpose, however good that may be, of instructing people about the New Testament. It must be done as all preaching is, for the purpose of grounding people in a real but intelligent faith. It must always be

incidental to this great purpose with which one preaches. But if it is so done, especially if it is done over a period of years, it can — without interfering with the spiritual purpose of the preacher but rather contributing to that end — do a great intellectual service to people; and this even when it brings before them questions which not so long ago were a puzzle or a terror even to the preacher himself.

With this *caveat* entered once more, and after these, more or less general considerations, we may turn more particularly (though not in too much detail) to some of the results of "form criticism." If the larger works of Bultmann, Schmidt and Dibelius¹ are not available, one can get an adequate introduction to the subject from Dr. Easton's little volume *The Gospel Before the Gospels* or from Dr. Grant's *Form Criticism*. The latter is a translation of one each of Dr. Bultmann's and Dr. Kundsins' briefer books and thus takes one directly into the home of this newer criticism of the Gospels.

Lying back of form criticism, and also corroborated by it, is the conviction that we cannot be sure that even in our earliest Gospel we have the events of Jesus' life recorded in the order of their happening. Nor can we be sure from it of the length of Jesus' public ministry. There is no material here for the tracing of the development of his "messianic consciousness." These are of course conclusions to which many men, even many who are not expert New Testament critics, had come quite independently of form criticism. That there is a degree of uncertainty about both the doings and the sayings of Jesus which to a generation or two ago would have seemed quite disturbing, is no news. Indeed one

¹ Martin Dibelius, *Formgeschichte des Evangeliums*; Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*; Karl Ludwig Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*.

hardly sees now why it should have been so disturbing, since it is only what was to be expected.

Nor is it new, although it is newer, that the material out of which the Gospels have been constructed consisted not originally of a continuous and well-connected story, but of isolated sayings and fragmentary reminiscences, and that whatever order we have is due to the evangelists themselves. When one observes how Matthew and Luke transpose the incidents in Mark to suit their purposes, and how differently they place the sayings which they have apparently taken from some common non-Markan source, one observes for oneself that the setting and arrangement always depend upon the evangelist. Nor is there any good reason to suppose that Mark knew more about the actual order of events, or felt himself giving them with any more fidelity to the facts, than Matthew or Luke. In this again there is nothing disturbing. It does not alter the general picture of Jesus.

Nor is the preacher these days likely to be disturbed by the fact that the stories of Jesus' miraculous healings are all told (as Bultmann points out) in one stereotyped way. They all begin, he says, with a description of the patient (see Grant, *Form Criticism*, pp. 37-9), then narrate the healing itself, and close with some exclamation of wonder, from a bystander, at what has occurred. One may ask, how else would they begin, or proceed, or naturally close? One will presumably have made up his mind long ago about the substratum of historical truth and the accretion of legendary elements in these stories, and the fact that in their present form they bear the mark of "folk tales" will not greatly affect it.

Form criticism divides the sayings of Jesus into several categories, the first of which Bultmann calls "apothegms."

In this class of sayings the story forms only a framework for the saying; the conversation of Jesus is constructed after the pattern of Jewish stories, in which the saying "usually appears as a counter-question or as a brief parable." Bultmann concludes that the setting for these apothegms must sometimes be given up as unhistorical, but that it "still remains possible, or even probable, that in many cases the saying of Jesus which it contains is thoroughly historical." Quite so; except that one might add that there is no reason for giving up even the setting unless there is something strange or suspicious about it. Anyhow, it is the saying that is important. The saying, and not the circumstances in which it was uttered, or the time or place, reveals the character of Jesus. Unless the preacher sees good reason to suppose that a given saying is not historical, he will naturally take it as such. When he finds Jesus quoting the Old Testament in testimony to himself, he will generally assume that this quotation comes not from Jesus but from the early church; it being a large part of the business of the early church to construct an Old Testament apologetic for the work and career of Jesus. If the preacher has any occasion to call attention to this fact, or to show how the same words of Jesus are occasionally put into different contexts by the evangelists, he will have let his people that far into the life of the early church, as also into the way the Gospels grew up. That the gospel was preached before it was written, and that the way it was preached has left its mark upon the way it was written, is not a disturbing fact but an illuminating one.

Form criticism classifies other sayings of Jesus as "proverbs," words of wisdom, like "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," "Sufficient unto the day is the

evil thereof," and similar sayings. Bultmann remarks that "the majority of these sayings have parallels in the Jewish Wisdom literature." Even though some of these may have grown up in the early church, which is certainly possible or even natural, we cannot usually be sure which ones have so grown up. If in any case the preacher is reasonably sure of that, he cannot of course preach upon it as a saying of Jesus. But he may here and there do good service by calling attention to a saying that is put into the mouth of Jesus but obviously does not fit there. Take for example the saying, "Cast not your pearls before swine; give not that which is holy unto the dogs." What a thing for Jesus to have said! Is it not precisely what he was always doing? When did he ever withhold a truth because he feared people would not appreciate it? Or a good deed lest someone might take advantage of it? I do not know that one would ever care to preach about this particular saying — there is plenty of better material. But the fact that one would not choose this saying for a sermon having anything to do either with Jesus or with the Christian temper toward the world, is proof of how badly the saying fits in the mouth of Jesus. If one wants to preach about it, and will show people that in all probability these words do not come from Jesus, but are an utterance of the early church's feeling toward Jews and "heathen," probably with reference to the Lord's Supper, he will have relieved Jesus of a cynical utterance quite at variance with his habitual temper and mode of speaking.

As to the sayings of Jesus that can be duplicated in the Wisdom literature of the Jews, it does not make a saying less wise or spiritually profitable that someone else also said it. Most of the practical wisdom of the world has been

uttered by more than one person. The originality of Jesus does not consist in his having said certain things which nobody else ever said, or even in his having said them better, but in the total impression of his life and character upon his contemporaries and the world. In discussing the Golden Rule, for instance, it detracts nothing from the validity of the advice contained in it that it can be found also in Chinese literature or that Hillel said something practically equivalent to it shortly before the time of Jesus. Nothing is gained by claiming for Jesus a kind of originality which nobody has ever had. If the preacher is ignorant of the parallels between many of Jesus' proverbial sayings and those of the rabbis, that is rather his misfortune than his good luck. It is also the misfortune of his congregation, since they are thus deprived of seeing Jesus in his relation to the wisdom of his people and his time. If form criticism has called our attention anew to these similarities it has only put much good homiletical material at the disposal of the preacher.

Bultmann, in the essay translated by Dr. Grant in his *Form Criticism*, remarks that it "now seems probable that some of the prophetic sayings of the Gospels were really derived from Christian prophets and were afterwards attributed to the historic Jesus." He adduces as an example the saying in Matthew 10:16, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep among wolves." Certainly. There were no circumstances in Jesus' time that would have warranted his saying such a thing. But there was ample justification for its being said to Christian preachers and missionaries who went out in times of persecution. In the same way, the beatitude put into the mouth of Jesus by Matthew, pronounced upon those who should be persecuted for Jesus' sake, seems to demand cir-

cumstances which did not exist in Jesus' time but in the time of persecution between Jesus' death and the writing of Matthew. The saying may be either a remodeling of something Jesus said, or a creation by the early church read back into his mouth. A study of the Gospel of John should make such a phenomenon appear quite natural to us; since in this later Gospel Jesus is represented as speaking of himself as having not only died but having risen and gone back to the Father (John 3:13). That there should be so much less of this "reading back" in the Synoptics is proof at once of their earlier date and their greater reliability as a source for the teachings of Jesus. But that this should be entirely absent from the Synoptic Gospels when there is so much of it in the Fourth Gospel, would be contrary to all reasonable expectation.

In general, and apart from details, I suppose the reason why form criticism gives pause to preachers, so far as it does so, is because it produces a general feeling of uncertainty about the teachings of Jesus and the facts of his life. Yet the main facts of his life and the general outline of his teaching remain quite what they were. The feeling of uncertainty on the part of the preacher is largely due to the fact that the matter is rather new to him. It is only the same sort of uncertain feeling which was for a time produced by the higher criticism of the Old Testament, and which passed away as preachers and other people grew more familiar with the newer views. But this would never have passed away with reference to the Old Testament if preachers had not familiarized themselves with the results of the newer learning, or had not communicated, however haltingly, some part of their new attitude to their people.

There are only a few simple things to be done about the newer knowledge of the New Testament, whether under the title "form criticism" or by whatever name called. The first is to make oneself familiar with it. The second is not to say anything from the pulpit which is inconsistent with what one knows about the New Testament. The third is a step beyond these two: to present to one's congregation whatever results of form or other criticism can be made useful for the spiritual purposes to which the pulpit is devoted. If one will do this latter, not as a New Testament scholar or a would-be theological instructor but as a preacher; if he will make the newer knowledge of the New Testament serve the end of enlightenment about and appreciation of the Christian message, he will soon find it an asset. We cannot shut our eyes to what we know. We cannot refuse to learn more for fear it will hinder or hamper us in our pulpit work. Intellectual honesty and the acquisition of new knowledge are minimum demands upon us preachers.

I may take as an example, perhaps quite as difficult as we should find, the treatment of the Lord's Prayer. From the beginning of Christian history this prayer has been thought of as going back to Jesus. No one need preach about the Lord's Prayer unless he wants to; but it is certainly a legitimate subject. If one does preach about it, he may take the prayer as it stands either in Matthew or in Luke, and make such a sermon about it as he will, neither comparing the two versions given in the two Gospels nor making any other critical comment concerning it. That is perfectly legitimate, now as always. But he may also, if he wishes, mention the fact that it is not in the Gospels of Mark and John. One explains its absence from John by that author's peculiar point

of view. Luke says Jesus taught his disciples the prayer because they had heard John's disciples repeating one which he had given them. The author of the Fourth Gospel would not have welcomed any such origin for a prayer from the lips of Jesus. It would have spoiled it for him if he knew that it had even started from a suggestion by the "Jews." Besides, John states that there are many sayings and doings of Jesus which he does not treat; he has selected only items that go to prove that Jesus was the Son of God. For that purpose the Lord's Prayer would be of no special use.

The absence of the prayer from Mark is not surprising since it shares this absence with so many other of the sayings of Jesus. But it might at least suggest that the prayer was not so well known nor so much used when and where Mark wrote as it was in the time and the environment of Matthew and Luke. The prayer however is at least much older than either Matthew or Luke, for they both take it from a source which is undoubtedly older than Mark. But there is the significant fact that though they do take it from that document, Luke gives it an entirely different setting from that which Matthew gives it, and has it in a briefer form. Luke says it was given at the request of the disciples, in imitation of a prayer of John the Baptist. Matthew gives it as an integral part of his Sermon on the Mount. Here we see, incidentally, that something has to be done about the "settings" of the sayings of Jesus, especially when they are quite unlike in two Gospels.

More significant than this fact of the different settings is the fact that in Matthew the prayer is expanded and has become much more liturgical. For Luke's simple "Father," Matthew has "Our Father who art in heaven." For Luke's

"Thy kingdom come," he has "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew adds the petition, "Deliver us from evil (or the evil one)." Consider also that in many manuscripts, though not in the oldest, Matthew also adds, "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." For us, this is as much a part of the Lord's Prayer as any of the rest of it. So here in the Gospels we see the prayer growing almost before our eyes. It certainly will not be maintained that Jesus spoke the prayer as Matthew and Luke both have it. Luke's form is doubtless as it came to him; he had too great reverence for the words of Jesus to abridge them from the lovely and complete form in which Matthew has them to his own comparatively bare and impoverished one. The fact that later manuscripts of Matthew have the clause, "For thine is the power and the kingdom and the glory," shows that such expansion went on after the days of Matthew. If afterwards, why not before? He would be a bold man who should affirm that Jesus never spoke this prayer in any form. Yet it has, especially in Matthew, a liturgical sound. It sounds like a church prayer, made for use in or adapted to the use of a congregation of worshiping people. As it is impossible to think of Jesus as laying down rules for church government and providing for excommunication as he is represented as doing in Matthew (Matt. 18:17), so it is at least difficult to think of him as preparing a ritual prayer for the church. No one can say that he did not. But even if he did, it certainly underwent some transformation before it got into the hands of Matthew.

Nobody preaches on the Lord's Prayer for the sake of saying such things as these. And one may preach on it without

any reference to them. But if one purpose of preaching about Jesus is to show what sort of man he was, and if another purpose of preaching from the New Testament at all is to give people some sympathetic insight into the life of the early Christian church, why should a man not mention these things? The very fact that, whether the prayer goes back to Jesus or not, the church took it, used it, adapted it, enlarged upon it, shows the necessity of beautiful and significant forms in which people can give expression to their common spiritual needs. That even in the most unliturgical churches, where the service may otherwise have as much ugliness as it will, this prayer still holds its place, shows the natural desire for beauty in the expression of spiritual desires.

In all this I have not been trying to show what a sermon on the Lord's Prayer ought to be, for that would depend on the preacher; and this material I have been talking about would be used, if at all, incidentally and probably by way of introduction. But I have been trying to show that what we know about the Lord's Prayer in the light of form or other recent New Testament criticism, is an asset of which we easily can and well may avail ourselves.

What form criticism has made clear in its own particular way is what other criticism not going under this name had already shown us, though not so clearly; namely, that the period between the death of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels was one of great activity in the church, and that this activity in the church had more to do with the gospel as we now find it in the Gospels, than we have sometimes supposed. Words of Jesus were adapted to use in the church and in its missionary activities. Sayings of his, parables and others, were interpreted in the light and for the needs of the times.

This was done by leaders of worshiping congregations, perhaps still more by preachers carrying the gospel into new territory and using the words of Jesus in circumstances and surroundings to which the actual life of Jesus was a stranger. If the recognition of this fact is attended by some incidental uncertainty on our part as to the actual words used by Jesus upon particular occasions, this is much more than compensated by the glimpse we get into the moving, breathing, living and necessarily transforming life of the early church.

In spite of all this it cannot be denied that at least a first acquaintance with form criticism may naturally cause some considerable uncertainty and therefore embarrassment to the preacher. He is apt to ask, "What *did* Jesus say? How do we know what he said and what has been read back into his mouth? Can we be sure of anything he said?" But this is rather a panicky question, not necessitated by the findings. Let it be admitted, as Dr. Grant says in his *Frontiers of Christian Thinking* (p. 38), that "the gospel tradition, during the oral period, was so thoroughly fluid that the original element and the 'accretion' are now all but inseparable." Let it be still a matter of uncertainty whether Jesus called himself the Son of Man or whether this was a messianic title given him by the early church; whether, as Schweitzer maintained, the thought of Jesus was wholly eschatological and even his ethical teachings are colored by the eschatological hope, or whether this element has been imported into his teaching by the early church. Unless there is some good reason for questioning any saying of Jesus, it will naturally stand as his. If there is any good reason for questioning it, then the preacher can either let the saying alone until he is himself more sure about it, or he can state his reasons for raising a question con-

cerning it. If one feels sure that a saying attributed to Jesus did not come from him, and if his purpose as a preacher requires him to discuss that saying, he should be able to make it appear to his hearers as it appears to him, that Jesus is better revealed without the saying than in it.

As I have more than once said, this is not a book on biblical criticism, but one attempting to show what use the preacher may make of the Bible as understood in the light of the biblical knowledge of the preacher's time; nor is it a book on theology. The answer to Dr. Grant's question, "Can Christology survive modern criticism?" (*Frontiers of Christian Thinking*, p. 4), will depend upon what one means by Christology and what sort of Christology one tries to save. Whether, again, he can save it by recourse to the conception of a "Spiritual Christ" such as Dr. Grant turns to; whether one finds help in Dr. Grant's statement (*Ibid.*, pp. 52, 55) that "It is the Spiritual Christ, not the historical — if a distinction must be made — who is the Founder and real source of the religion known as Christianity," will depend upon precisely what these statements mean to one and how they fit in with his general theological conceptions. At all events, these are matters of theology rather than questions about what to do with the Bible in the pulpit.

Lest I should seem to forget that it is this latter question that I am concerned with, let me apologize if necessary for introducing so much material of the kind in these last few pages, and say: of the Testaments the incomparably richer for the preacher is the New, since it is in the New Testament that he finds the distinctively Christian ideas, and the picture of Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity; the New Testament every Christian preacher must preach. But he

cannot preach it as he would have done before these newer conceptions of the New Testament literature came to his attention. Nor should he desire to do so. The details of New Testament criticism interest the scholar, and the preacher (so far as he is a scholar) in his study. His knowledge of them will affect his view not only of the New Testament as a literature, but of the beginnings of Christianity and the character and teachings of its Founder. But let him be anxious, in his references to the newer views of the New Testament as in all his use of the Bible, not to display his learning nor to reveal himself as up to or ahead of the times, but to do his people good by making them more intelligent about the New Testament and the spiritual movement that is there reflected, and he will find that the most modern results of the most modern New Testament study will be that much power added to his spiritual purpose. Let him avoid jumping at conclusions, keep the results of his study in his mind till he is adjusted to them and they to him, so as to say as little as possible which he will wish afterwards that he had not said. But above all let him use, wherever he can for a truly spiritual purpose, all that he knows or can learn about the New Testament. The New Testament can stand it.

If anyone doubts whether such items as I have been speaking of have any interest for people, I may be permitted to refer once more to my own experience. At one time I was engaged for several years in a more or less detailed study of the Synoptic Gospels. During that period I found it easy and natural to draw a large number of my sermons from them. And equally easy and natural to work into these sermons a considerable amount of information concerning those Gospels, which, being so recently acquired was of interest to me — and, the acquisition having been costly, it seemed as

if I ought to get some homiletic benefit from it. I often wondered whether I did too much of this, and whether perhaps it grew tedious or had an unpleasant pedantic sound in the ears of my hearers. While I was in this apologetic mood about it, one Sunday a man from the congregation came up to me after the sermon. I assumed that he had come to register some objection and braced myself for it, but he asked me, "Where do you get all this stuff that you use in the introductions to your sermons? I mean this incidental stuff about the Gospels themselves?" I told him, as well as I could, not knowing yet whether this would strengthen or weaken his objection. "Well," said he, "I like it better than the rest of the sermon." I wish I could be sure he said "*even* better than the rest," or "almost better than the rest"; but my surprise was so great that the registering of his words was somewhat inexact. At any rate, he made no complaint about the rest of my sermons but wanted it understood that the literary and critical comments interested him particularly. If I did not have many more compliments of the same kind I reassured myself by the reflection that not everybody was as intelligent and critical as this man, he being a professor in the university!

As illustrations of what may be done with such material as I have discussed in this chapter, for purposes of the kind of preaching I have been advocating all along, I venture to print here two sermons, one on the little parable of the seed that grew of itself, the other on the parable of the unwilling guests. First, I present

THE UNWILLING GUESTS

And hearing these words one of those that sat at meat with Him said unto Him, Happy is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto them: A man prepared a great supper and invited many guests. And at the hour of the supper he sent his

servant to say to them that were invited, Come, for all is now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground and I must go and see it; I pray thee, have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen and I must go and prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come. So the servant came and reported these words to his master. Then the master of the house was angry and said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and the lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, what thou commandest hath been done, and still there is room. And the Lord said to the servant, Go out into the highways and the hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you that none of these men who were invited shall taste of my supper.

Luke 14:15-24.

Whoever will look closely at almost any part of the New Testament will see certain indications of how the whole book was written. I do not often bother you with such things from the pulpit; but this is so clear and beautiful a case that I cannot avoid the opportunity. I ask you therefore to compare this parable as Luke reports it with the same story as told by Matthew.

The setting, to begin with, is altogether different. Matthew says it was spoken by Jesus after he arrived in Jerusalem. Luke says it was spoken on the way up, through Samaria, and specifies that it was in the house of a Pharisee who had invited Jesus to dinner.

But the differences in the parable itself are equally marked.

Here is Matthew's version of it: "And Jesus answered and spoke unto them again in parables, saying, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a king who made a marriage feast for his son. And he sent forth his servants to call those that had

been invited. But they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell those that have been invited, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatlings are killed and all is ready; come to the marriage feast. But they gave no heed, and went away, one to his field, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants and ill-treated them and slew them. But the king was angry; and he sent forth his armies and destroyed these murderers and burned their city. Then said he to his servants, The marriage feast is ready, but they who were invited were not worthy. Go ye then to the cross-roads, and whomever ye find invite to the marriage feast. So the servants went out into the highways, and collected all whom they found, both good and bad; and the marriage hall was filled with guests (Matt. 22:1-10).

I like Luke's account much better, and think it is probably nearer to what Jesus originally said. Luke is specific where Matthew is general. Matthew simply says the men were unwilling to come and went each about his own affairs. Luke gives each man's excuse in his own words.

But there is one item, that impossible item, in Matthew's story, that when the king heard that the guests would not come, he sent out his soldiers and killed them all and burned down their city; and then went right on with his banquet as if nothing had happened. Didn't you ever notice that? Or didn't it ever bother you? Didn't you ever ask yourself whether the king himself lived in that same town, and how it came that his house wasn't burned down with the rest? If you are a housekeeper it certainly must have occurred to you that it was a long time to keep dinner waiting while the soldiers went out and burned a city and killed all the people

in it. Or don't you ask any questions when you read the Bible?

N^o. All I want to say about this is, that the inspiration of the New Testament is in its great ideas and ideals. Of any notion that it extends to words and syllables and that the salvation of any human soul hangs on these, its authors were quite innocent. They had got hold of the great ideas that are at the bottom of the Christian religion and that Jesus taught — about the love and mercy of God, about the preciousness of the human soul, about a Kingdom of God that was to come in the world, about conscience and duty and kindness, and so on. They had got hold of these great ideas, embedded in the words and deeds of Jesus. And then they wrote like other men. Wrote what they had heard other men say. Wrote what they found in earlier books. Wrote, each one of them, as it was natural for him to write. Do not be afraid of reading the New Testament with your eyes open. It was made to be read that way. It is a human book; you must read it humanly. And its inspiration is not in words and letters and punctuation marks but in the great, immortal, incomparable ideas that pervade it.

Now in the parable itself, let me first pick out some incidental implications. Not the main point, but just some things by the way.

First: the reason most of us do not get the best out of life is that we are so busy with other and smaller matters. This feast was the great event of the day. But the men did not have time to go to it. They were not necessarily trifling when they said they could not come. They may have been quite sincere. But they had too many things on hand. We all do. Once in a while I get around to do something that

is really of consequence — to let a little ray of hope into some other man's heart or a little ray of knowledge into my own — to sit down at the table spread by the wise and great of the earth, the artists and the creators and the saints. And as often as I do, I say to myself, "Why, this is what we are here for. We ought to do this whether we do anything else or not. Why don't I always do something like this?" Then it is weeks, or months, before I do. Truth and beauty are forever inviting us. The feast is always on. But we are busy with mere chores, and cannot go. This is a small matter, perhaps, but we must look out for it.

I can see some other excuses for these men who would not attend. Not to their credit, to be sure, but they go back to some traits in human nature that are still with us. The banquet was a big one, to begin with. A miscellaneous affair. Many guests. Nothing exclusive about it. No particular distinction to be invited to it. A sort of Tom, Dick and Harry affair. Oxen and fatlings and a seat for everybody. Not a social event. More like an Iowa picnic at Syracuse Grove in Los Angeles. You couldn't tell whom you might meet there. Might be some man of whom you had borrowed money. Might be your neighbor's hired man. The garbage man, maybe. Or somebody whom you never could stand. Maimed, halt, blind, everybody. Too many people. Too big. Common. There is a streak of "aristocracy" in most people, especially in those who have the least reason for it. Maybe these men felt that way. It would be more likely, perhaps, if they had been women. But even men might feel so.

And there is in the second place something in human nature which some people call ingratitude. I do not call it

quite that. I call it just human nature. People do not always like to have things done for them. They like to do things for themselves, and they like to do what they have planned on instead of what someone else suggests. Especially it sets people off to have anybody do good to them in a big, wholesale and sort of impersonal way. Men who try to do good are often disappointed at this trait in human nature. A business man once said to me, "If a man is going to spend a lot of money for his employes with the idea that they will thank him for it, he might as well give it up; they won't." Notable experiments in philanthropy have come to grief on this rock. When Mr. Pullman built his model town for his employes, with its sanitary kitchens and its parks for the children, its paved streets and its low rents, everybody was pleased with it except those for whom it was done. They went on a strike. They preferred their own crooked streets to the company's straight ones, and their own old cook-stoves to anybody else's new ones.

People do dearly love to do what they want to. You go into some part of the town and start a Sunday school or some other institution for the good of the people there. You put your own money and your own time into it, till finally it comes over you that the people for whom you have done it do not care anything about it, and you stop in disgust. It is not so much ingratitude as independence. They did not ask you to do all this. People do not like to be done good to. Mr. Carnegie was one of our great philanthropists. But the more libraries he built the more people seemed to think they had a right to them. They said, "He has to get rid of his money some way. And what is he doing with so much money anyhow?" That isn't nice. It isn't reasonable. But

it is the way some people feel. Maybe the men in the parable felt that way.

In the third place, I would not identify God too closely with the host in this parable. The host didn't act much if any better than his guests. They didn't come; that was bad. But he got angry about it, which was just as bad. I relieve him, as I said, of the charge of having killed them and burned down their town. That was too much for Luke, if he ever heard the story that way. But even Luke says he was angry, and said to his servants, "Those people will never see the inside of my house." And I do not believe God is ever angry with us. I imagine he is disgusted with us, sometimes. I do not see how he can help that. He must be astonished at our slowness and our stupidity. But he isn't angry about it. And one thing he never does; he never withdraws his invitation just because we haven't sense enough to accept it the first time. On the contrary, this is precisely the difference between God and the best man who ever spread a feast for his friends in this world. You might live a million years and you would never hear him say, "Those people could not come when I asked them. I'll show them. Let them starve."

No; the door of God's house is always open to us. We may be foolish so long that we lose the power ever to be wise. We may start so late that it will be night before we get there. We may be so occupied with our land and our cattle that the big invitation will never really get through to us. But God will never take it back. His love takes in not only the alert and the ready, the good and the wise, but the wayward and the careless as well—the sour philanthropist and the unwilling guest, the servants who carry the message and the men who are too busy to accept, the rugged and the prosper-

ous and the tramps on the highway. If God is not like that I do not see any use of having him at all. The smaller goodness many of us can reach. What we need God for is to assure us that there is an infinite hospitality which not even our human churlishness can ever impair.

N.B. But the one great lesson of this parable for me, the one I read most clearly and also need most sorely for myself is, that no calamity can befall a man so great as the disaster of the closed heart, and no gift come to him comparable for a moment with the gift of the open heart. The unwilling guests had many different excuses, but they had one common lack. They did not have the open heart. They were suspicious, afraid somebody was going to put something over on them, on their guard, shut.

That is the ultimate calamity. We live by what comes in to us. We do not originate. We do not create. No love, no knowledge, no wisdom, do we make out of nothing, and in our own hearts alone by ourselves. But we receive, we work over; we take in knowledge and work it over into wisdom for ourselves. We take in love and live on it and give it out with the stamp of our own individuality upon it. We put together in our own lives what God and men and nature have first given to us. And the man who does not take anything in has nothing either to give out or to live on himself. That is the first step in the process. As Walt Whitman says,

There was a child went forth every day
And the first object he looked upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him.

But if you will imagine a child going forth of whom nothing ever became a part because nothing ever got through to him,

because his heart was shut — no influence of the good green earth, no sweetness from the breath of spring, no power from the rising of the morning sun, no love from the hearts of men and women — you have imagined a man whose own heart will be a desert, barren of happiness for itself or of blessing for anyone else.

I can only say it over to you again. It is a simple message, but it is the key to all our spiritual life. Keep your heart open. Power and beauty and love and blessing are abroad in the world. Out of the mouth of Jesus come again and forever again the gracious words, "Come unto me. Behold I stand at the door and knock." Out of the infinite love comes the divine invitation; keep your hearts open. Let no ingratitude of others nor any fear or suspicion of your own nor any unhappy experience of any sort shut you up against the divine invitation that sounds forever in the ears of men. Keep your heart open; and when you hear, then come.

My second sermon is

THE SEED THAT GREW OF ITSELF

And he said, So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed on the ground;

And should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

But when the fruit is brought forth, he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

Mark 4:26-29.

This little parable of Jesus' is preserved for us in the Gospel of Mark alone. Luke had to find room for the parables of

the lost coin, the lost sheep, the foolish rich man, the good Samaritan, the prodigal son; Matthew for the Sermon on the Mount. So each of them had to leave out something which he found in Mark.

They usually keep all the words of Jesus which Mark had recorded, for the words of Jesus were especially precious. With one exception, there is not a single saying of Jesus in Mark which is not found either in Matthew or in Luke or in both of them. The exception is this little parable about the seed which grew of itself. Matthew and Luke unite in leaving this out.

Various reasons have been conjectured for this omission. Perhaps the parable looked to Matthew and Luke too much like that of the seed that fell on the different kinds of soil. Perhaps they thought it was not much encouragement to activity among the early converts to say that nothing had to be done about the Kingdom of God except to sow the seed and let it grow. Perhaps the little parable looked to them too simple. Perhaps they both just happened to leave it out. Anyhow, they both did. It is about the only thing we should lose if we lost the whole Gospel of Mark. For Matthew and Luke, one or both, have taken everything else he had.

I said, perhaps they thought it was too simple. For simple it certainly is. The farmer sows his seed. Then he sleeps and rises night and day and lets it grow. He cannot make it grow. He cannot even understand how it does grow. He only knows that it does. No use for him to worry about it. He cannot hurry it. All he can do is to watch it and gather the harvest when it is ripe. "The Kingdom of God," says Jesus, "is like that."

If it was worth while for Jesus to say so simple a thing, it is probably worth while for us to see what is involved in it.

First: Man builds everywhere on what he cannot understand. An element of the unexplained seems logically unavoidable. We explain one thing by referring it to another. The events now happening in Germany go back to the Versailles Treaty, the Versailles Treaty to the World War, the World War to the policy of the Prussian state under Bismarck — and so on.

Now, obviously, we can follow this back till we get to where we do not know what came before. When we get to that point, we have a chain, the links of which are good, but what the first link hangs on we do not know. It is the old predicament expressed in the familiar question, which came first — the egg or the hen?

And as it is in history, so it is in nature. We may break the atoms up into electrons, but why the electrons act this way or that, we cannot say. They are made so. That's all. It is their nature. Science asks, "How do things happen? How does one thing come out of another or get changed into it?" But that thing, whatever it is, has to be explained by something else. And that something else by still something else. We have to come to an end of this somewhere. We talk about "the riddle of existence," as though, if we could only get deeper into the processes of bodily growth, or further away into the heavens, or split the molecule into smaller bits — we could have an answer to it. But we should not. Existence is not a riddle, in the sense that there is an answer to it if you only guess long enough. It is simply a fact. Inside of existence many things, perhaps most things, can be

explained. But existence itself cannot be. It has to be accepted. It is there. It is the thing we start with.

Second: This little parable indicates the relative importance of ultimate questions and practical needs. If the farmer had allowed himself to spend his time finding out how the seed grew in the ground, he would never have got around to sowing it. But starting with the fact that it would grow, that the earth brings forth things of itself, though he did not know how, he gave his time to the sowing and the reaping of it.

The farmer these days has many other things to worry about. Sometimes he wishes the seed, especially that which has been sown in some other part of the world, would not grow, and that the earth would stop bringing forth so much. In 1927 we had 125 million bushels of wheat that we could neither use nor sell. So we kept it. In 1933 we had 350 million bushels, and it was worth something like thirty cents. From 1890 on, Russia quadrupled her wheat crop, Canada quadrupled hers, Australia tripled hers and Argentina multiplied hers by five.

"The farmers of the world," says Sir Philip Gibbs, "stand looking over last year's harvests, so good to see, and know that they are ruined. In Alberta groups of farmers advocated that no crops be grown next spring. In Australia and the Argentine the ranchers looked at their sheep and cattle and knew that the prices they would fetch would not pay for their raising." Here at home we pay the farmer for not raising so much. Here is a problem much more pressing than the ultimate one of how the seed grows in the ground. The world has to be fed. Why can't the man who feeds it make a living himself? This is no ultimate question

shading off into the unknowable. It is a perfectly practical matter. Somebody must be able to understand it.

I hope I appreciate the beauty and nobility of abstract thought. Bertrand Russell finds in mathematics, as Mr. Santayana says, "a heaven suffused with a serene radiance and full of peculiar sweetness and consolation." Mathematics was never exactly a heaven for me; probably because I did not get through purgatory in it, and was never sure which way I was going from there. When Mr. Russell was young, he says, he had fits of despondency in which he wanted to die; except that he wanted to know a little more about mathematics before he did so. "Remote from human passions," he says of mathematics, "remote even from the pitiful laws of nature, the generations have gradually created an ordered cosmos, where pure thought can dwell as in its natural home, and can escape from the dreary exile of the actual world."

But it must be very lonesome in that upper world, and very hard to breathe there. Not one man in a million knows how to climb into it, or would have any fun if he found himself there. And the rest of us want to know, "Is there any arrangement by which we can all of us — not a few of us but all of us — breathe a little freer and with a little more assurance in the world where we do live?"

Some questions may be beyond us. But it does not follow that because we cannot understand everything we cannot understand anything. The things we have to know to get along in the world, we must be able to understand. One of these things is the question of the man on the land. If we could set the combined intelligence of the world on that and get it straightened out, we could resign the upper realm of pure thought to Mr. Russell and whomever else he meets there.

So it is with other matters. The things we really need to know are always close to the grass.

Third: What Jesus was impressed with was the power of nature. And he drew from this a lesson for human comfort and the peace of the soul. "The ground," he says, "brings forth fruit of itself." There is only so much that a man can do. There was only so much that he could do himself. He could sow the seed. He could not make it grow. Nature would have to do that.

Not everybody thought so. "Since the days of John the Baptist," Jesus complained, "the Kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." He did not believe it could be so taken. It had to grow. All you could do was to sow the seed. Having done that you might as well have an easy mind, sleep and rise night and day and go about the business of your life, whatever it was. Sitting up or lying awake would not make it grow any faster.

This is not an encouragement to human carelessness or laziness. You must sow the seed. You must keep your eyes open and not be asleep when it is time to go to the harvest. But in the meantime you are to have a sublime confidence in the power of nature to bring forth.

The Kingdom of Heaven which Jesus wanted was not a kingdom in some other world, but a kingdom of God here in the earth. That kingdom he could not create. It had to grow. The seed of it was certain attitudes, feelings, ideas in the hearts of men. If he could plant these ideas and others would sow them after him, nature would take care of the rest.

It is the only way we get a better world. We need organization. But the fundamental thing is to get the right idea

into the soil of the human heart. "It is not men that interest or disturb me primarily," said Woodrow Wilson, "it is ideas. ^{78.} Men die. Ideas live." They are the only things which in the last analysis have power.

The conflict of the world now as always is a conflict of ideas. In finance it is the conflict between one idea of money and another. In economics it is the conflict between the idea that human welfare can safely be left unequally distributed, and the idea that it must be spread around. In ethics it is a conflict between the idea of duty, obligation, principle and the idea of pleasure and self-indulgence. In international relations it is between the idea that force is the best appeal and the idea that reason and good will are safer and better than force.

Everything goes back to ideas. Get the ideas right and things will come right. But from the wrong ideas everything wrong is sure to come. "You cannot force the Kingdom of God," said Jesus—you cannot rush it. But you can sow the seed of those ideas from which it naturally and necessarily grows.

There is only one thing, therefore, that we have to look out for. And that is to sow the right ideas in the souls of men. Now I ask you: Is it not time to pay attention to that? Have we not sowed the wrong kind long enough?—the seeds of competition instead of co-operation, of war instead of peace, of hatred and not of love? And from this sowing of dragon's teeth are we not reaping the devil's own harvest? "Ye have plowed wickedness," said Hosea, and are not our own bellies full of such nauseous fruit this year of grace? "Ye have sowed the wind, and ye shall reap the whirlwind," said he. And what is this whirlwind that is still sweeping the

world, but the harvest of that sowing? And haven't we had enough of it? "Sow to yourselves in righteousness," he advised, "and reap according to kindness. Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till he come and rain righteousness upon you." And so in my heart I believe it is.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ACTS AND EPISTLES

OUTSIDE of the Gospels one may take an example of the kind of material I have in mind in this discussion, and of the use I think can be made of it, from the Book of Acts. Many other passages would serve as well, but take the story of the riot at Ephesus, told in the nineteenth chapter. That religion still interferes with business, that business still objects, that people still resort to mob law when the courts are open and still yell for "the space of two hours" without knowing what they are yelling about, is all plain and pertinent enough and is good homiletic material for any preacher who questions whether the *vox populi* is always the *vox dei*. But what a light the story throws, incidentally, upon the character of the greatest of all Christian missionaries and on the circumstances under which the gospel made its way in the early times.

Still better, as throwing light at once upon the character of the Book of Acts and upon a prominent feature of early church life, is the matter of speaking with tongues as one sees this uncovered in the Book of Acts and in the First Epistle to the Corinthians respectively. Between the testimony of an eye witness and that of one who writes from reports that have come down to him, it should not take long to choose. Paul was an eye witness to this phenomenon of speaking with tongues. He lived in the midst of it. He

himself even indulged in it, or was able to do so if he wished. It may therefore be assumed that he knew what it was. And as he depicts it in the fourteenth chapter of this epistle, it is quite clear what it was. It was a wild, rapt, ecstatic utterance, such as has broken out in many periods of revival or other religious excitement, as often as the tongues of men have been loosed and their reason temporarily submerged by religious emotion. This phenomenon has not yet entirely disappeared from religion. It is sometimes uncomplimentarily referred to as "the power," and we think of it as belonging to the colored people of the south, or to one or two small sects. But it appears to have been a fairly regular feature of the worship of the early church. Paul does not feel at liberty to forbid it, for did not Jesus say that sometimes the tares must be allowed to grow with the wheat until the harvest? But he did discourage it and he did try to regulate it and reduce it to some order; one at a time, said he, not all together, and let someone try to tell what it means or else do not have it at all. Otherwise people will think that you are crazy. This is what "speaking with tongues" was in Paul's churches.

But in the Book of Acts it becomes quite a different thing. It is there the ability to speak foreign languages without having previously studied them. This taken almost by itself would show that the Book of Acts is later than the epistles of Paul. What was in Paul's time a troublesome and disorderly ebullition of religious feeling became to a later historian a dignified and scholarly performance. To be sure, scholars know the relative dates of Acts and the Epistles otherwise than by this clue; but most people do not know it either otherwise or this way. Is there any reason why they should not? One does not preach with the mentioning of such

things as his main purpose, to be sure. He preaches, perhaps, on the place of feeling in religion — need enough of that, God knows — of the beauty of emotion deep, true, tender, yet controlled by the spirit of God that speaks in the reason and good sense of mankind. But, incidentally, he shows that the golden age of the church was not in the New Testament times — at least not at Corinth — that history in early Christian times was no more an exact science than in Old Testament days. Incidentally, too, he lets in a little light upon the relation and character of various parts of the New Testament. And again, what one does in a sermon incidentally, may be quite as valuable as what one does primarily.

One may use in a similar way the roll of heroes which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives in his eleventh chapter. For this is clearly what he gives there. He takes out of the accumulated traditions of his people a list of great names. To be sure, he uses them all as illustrations of "faith," yet one feels that with some of them he has had to work hard to bring them under this category. Forward-looking, perhaps, they all were, yet what do we know about Abel or Enoch to permit us to say even that much of them? They are the names that stand out in Hebrew history, as certain names stand out in American history and would be included in any list made up for almost any complimentary purpose. Some of the names give one pause. There is Rahab the harlot; just how did she deserve inclusion in such a list? It has been argued that Samson is a sun myth. If so it relieves him of moral responsibility, a relief which he greatly needs; for of all the heroes in this list he is surely the most purely heathen one. Enoch doubtless got into it by

reason of certain legends concerning him not known to most of us because not included in our Bible. But the list is a strange one — once we get over the veneration we have for it because of its place in a truly great chapter. And its inclusion in an epistle which, to whomever addressed or unaddressed is certainly a Christian document, throws light on the Christian ideal of the time.

To how many Christian people the process by which Christianity got transferred from the Hebrew to the Greco-Roman world, what part was played in that transference by particular individuals, and how the greatest single contribution to that world-changing occurrence was made by one man who never personally knew Jesus, and who in spite of his labors never won a recognized place among the "apostles," is practically an unknown story still! Except to the preachers themselves, of course. If one cared to preach, for instance, on Christian liberty, and would start from the account which Paul gives of himself in his letter to the Galatians, here at his hand is a revelation of the rivalries and misunderstandings that troubled the early church, of the vacillation of Peter, the absolute self-assurance of Paul, and an insight into the thorny questions that inevitably but sorely troubled that early epoch.

But I will not pause for more details. I trust that what has been said is enough to show the almost unlimited extent and the varied character of the material which has now been put into the preacher's hand by the newer knowledge of the Bible. Citations of passages which lend themselves to homiletic use from this modern point of view might be multiplied many times over. It is sufficient for my purpose if I have dealt with enough individual passages, in a sufficiently de-

tailed manner, as to leave no doubt about the kind of preaching I have in mind and the kind of material that is to be found for it. I print as one further and final illustration a sermon called *Tongues of Flame* preached on the supposed nineteen hundredth anniversary of the Day of Pentecost.

TONGUES OF FLAME

But Peter standing up with the eleven lifted up his voice and said, Harken to my words. These men are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet: In the last days, saith God, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.

Acts 2:14-17.

The Day of Pentecost, as described in the Book of Acts, is commonly and rightly referred to as the birthday of the Christian church. The Protestant churches of the world are united in an informal agreement to celebrate it this year as the church's nineteen hundredth anniversary.

I want to do three things in speaking of it today. First, I want to clear up one or two items in the story of what happened on it. Second, I want to state the real significance of the story. Third, I want to make one or two remarks of my own.

As to the items that need clearing up: there are two difficulties in the story, I mean, two items that might cause people to wonder about it, or even to question it. The first is that of the "tongues like as of fire." The apostles were gathered, with some others apparently, in a house in Jerusalem. Maybe in a private house, maybe in the porch of Solomon where they sometimes met; anyway, somewhere

indoors. And all of a sudden they heard a sound like a blast of wind. The author is careful not to say it *was* a wind; it only sounded like it. In the Semitic languages as in Greek the word for wind and the word for spirit are one and the same. I take it therefore that what the author means is that they heard something appropriate to and suggestive of the descent of the spirit that was about to occur. He means to say that there was no doubt or uncertainty about the spirit's coming to them; indeed, it came with such power that you could hear it.

But you could not only hear it. You could see it. For there were tongues like flame! Again the author is careful not to say they were of actual fire. They only looked like it. But they rested upon the heads of the apostles. John the Baptist said the Messiah would baptize with the holy spirit and with fire. It was a sort of symbol for the spirit, enlightening, purifying, like the spirit. These flames rested on the heads of the apostles long enough to be seen, and then disappeared. Where to? Why, into the apostles, I suppose. They came from above, and so had to come first to their heads, but where they had started for was not the heads of the apostles but their hearts; they only rested a moment on their heads as they went into them.

Did these people actually hear something like a big wind? I do not know. People have heard many curious things — Joan of Arc heard angels; many saints and mystics have had the same experience. The world seems to be full of voices. Did they actually see something like tongues of fire? I do not know. People have seen many curious things; visions are common in all religions and at all times; Luther saw the devil; Paul saw the Lord. Anyway, the author was not a

realist or a modernist. He spoke in oriental and imaginative language. And what he says is that when the apostles received the spirit on that day of Pentecost, the experience was so vivid that you could both see and hear it. There is really no difficulty here.

But with the other item there is. For the author clearly represents the apostles immediately afterwards, and as a result, as speaking foreign languages which they had never before known. Did they do that? I think it very unlikely. If God had seen fit to give to William Carey when he went to India a knowledge of the languages he would have to speak there, so as to save him the trouble of learning them, I could see some point to that. If he had bestowed upon Livingstone just before he entered the Dark Continent a mastery of the babel of confusing dialects he would meet there, that also would appear to me to have been to the point. But that he should confer upon these Galileans the power to speak seven or eight different languages when they were not going to any foreign country to preach and when everybody present (for they were all Jews) could understand them perfectly in their native tongue, does not seem to me to be like him. If he works miracles he certainly does not waste them. I think it very unlikely that that is what happened.

And I think the story itself makes it unlikely. For some of the people who heard them, said, "They are drunk." The explanation was a flippant one. It did not fit. It was impossible, as Peter said, for anyone to be drunk so early in the day — nine o'clock. But the fact that people *said* they were drunk is important. For if these men had been speaking foreign languages, perfectly clearly and plainly, so that every man acquainted with these languages understood

them, the last thing that would have occurred to anyone would have been that they were intoxicated. When a man gets drunk, he may say many words that are unintelligible and that do not go together to make any sense. But one thing he does not do is to break forth into some language that he never knew before and speak it like his mother tongue. On the other hand, if these people were very much excited, and talked too fast, or broke out into some sort of ecstatic utterance which their hearers could not understand, then they might easily have been suspected of being drunk.

And this is what I imagine happened. We know from the letters of Paul that many of his converts in moments of religious excitement had the habit of "speaking with tongues," as he called it. He could do it himself upon occasion, he said. But he didn't think much of it. He wrote the Corinthians quite at length about it, and said, among other things, "If at a gathering of the church everybody speaks in tongues, and if outsiders or unbelievers come in, will they not say you are insane?" I imagine that something like this — a phenomenon duplicated over and over again in the history of all religions — is what happened at Pentecost. The author, not being personally acquainted with the phenomenon as Paul was, but with the well-known tendency to throw a glamor over what has happened in the past, represents it as a sudden and miraculous mastery of foreign languages. That is undoubtedly the way it had come to him.

So much for the items that have probably struck every reader of the story as being a little queer.

Second, the real significance of the story, and the permanent historical value of it, is simply this: that the Christian church was born out of a great enthusiasm. A new hope

had dawned. A new understanding, of life and of death, had come with Jesus Christ. A new breath of the spirit was blowing upon the world. A new fire burned in the hearts of men. And out of this enthusiasm the church was born.

Third, for some obvious reflections of my own.

And first among these, I have heard this story of Pentecost referred to in terms that seem to me neither healthy nor hopeful. Some people are always harking back to it, and to other scenes like it, with a longing that it should be reproduced in our times and an implied rebuke upon us that we do not reproduce it. They think something happened at Pentecost the like of which has never happened since. They imply that somehow it is our fault that it does not happen nowadays. If we were only ready, if our hearts were only pure and our souls clean, if we would only lean upon God, so the implication runs, then he would pour out upon us the same sort of spirit in the same wonderful way.

I do not think this is true. Or fair. Many things have happened since Pentecost which have been equally an outpouring of the spirit of God. When William Booth started the Salvation Army; or when John Wesley began to preach in the fields around the coal mines; or when the modern missionary movement was born in the Protestant churches, I do not see why all of these things and many others like them were not as blessed in their results, as startling in their manifestations, and as truly outpourings of the spirit of God, as Pentecost. This harking back either to Pentecost or to any other day that is gone, as if the church had something then which she has lost, which she ought to regain and which God would like to give her again if she would only be devout and pious enough, never did anybody any good. And it is

historically untrue and absurd. The birthday of an institution is like the birthday of a man. The first one is the most important in that if you do not have the first one, you cannot have any of those that follow. But many of those that follow ought to be and are more significant and glorious than the first one. How could we have got along, to be sure, without those three thousand souls that came into the church that day? But I have no doubt the apostles often wondered what to do with many of them. The church has had many birthdays since that first one. But her best birthday is always in the future.

But, second: At the heart of all genuine religion there must always be a great enthusiasm. This will not show itself in our day, if we are wise, in speaking with tongues. It may show itself but little in any spectacular or unusual way. We are probably too afraid of being thought peculiar, too timid about saying or doing the thing our souls prompt us to, for fear somebody will think we are drunk. But after all, the enthusiasm that exhausts itself in "ah's" and "oh's" is not the kind that transforms the world. On the other hand, cynicism, the feeling that nothing can really be accomplished and that only the fool will try anything big, is the thing which above any and all others makes a man no good for any high human purpose. Such a man, no matter upon how many church rolls his name may have been, nor how well he may behave nor how serenely he may trust the Lord, such a man, in religion as in everything else, is a brake, scraping forever on the wheels of progress. He is no good.

Too many people can hear no wind of the spirit blowing, see no tongue as of flame upon anybody's head. If they

had been in the house at Pentecost, they would have seen and heard — nothing. Show it how you will — in bursts of indignation over the accumulated hoary wrongs and injustices of the world, in quiet devotion to great human projects, in the life-long pursuit of ideals of which you seldom speak but which rouse in you as long as you live the glory and the beauty of the dawn, in your patient persistent confidence in the coming of a kingdom of God within you and without you — show it how you will, if you have any enthusiasm the spirit of God is alive in you. But beware of cynicism, and if you feel it rising in you give no tongue to it, for it is the sign of a beaten spirit, baffled before the complexities and difficulties of life. Keep away from cynicism; it is a symptom of a sour spirit, a pose to cover the nakedness of your soul, a sign of spiritual senility. When the great tides of feeling that lift the human soul to its heights have died down in you, and left your heart a peat-bog instead of an ocean, genuine religion has become impossible to you. It cannot live except upon enthusiasm.

Finally: Something does come to us from above — from the past with all its accomplishment, from the future with its hopes and visions, from the hearts of our fellows, from God in whom we live. Each one of us by himself is little or nothing. But we are a part of a wonderful spiritual organism. The seeing eye, the listening ear, the understanding heart, are keys that open the doors of life. Keep your eye open and tongues as of flame, purifying and enlightening, will appear to you on many a head and glorify it with the image of God. Listen, for the wind of the spirit blows through this old world now as always. And when you see it, and

when you hear it, then do not be silly and say like the bystanders at Pentecost that they are drunk, but say with Peter, for that is the truth, "This is that which was spoken through the prophet, I will pour out my spirit upon them." Keep your eyes open; for to all those who can see, and hear, and understand, the Day of Pentecost is always here.

CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

I DO NOT wish to burden the reader further with the study of particular passages. I do not apologize for bringing forward so many as I have used, nor for the detail in which I have treated many of them. I have wished to show that there is a kind of preaching which is still preaching, as real and as human as any preaching and as up to date, if one knows how to make it so, but which can also serve in an eminent way the education of the people, both as to the Bible itself and as to the spiritual history and development that lie back of or within it. This I have done by "the case method" because this seemed the most concrete and explicit way of showing what I have in mind.

The passages I have used for this purpose are not necessarily better suited for the purpose than scores of others. Indeed I have selected some of them just because upon their surface they have, homiletically speaking, a forbidding rather than an inviting look. A student in one of my classes remarked that the chief benefit of such a course was to demonstrate that any part of the Bible, if you give sufficient study to it, will yield homiletic material. That is perhaps not quite true. I can imagine how difficult it would be to get even a poor sermon out of some of the lists of names in the books of Chronicles. It is also one advantage of the modern point of view that we do not have to hold to the

value, homiletic or otherwise, of every part of the Bible, but can frankly mark many portions of it down to where we think they belong. Yet I was glad to have this student say what he did, since it indicated that he may (if he does not forget it) make for himself a fruitful quest among portions of the Bible not treated in the course or in this volume.

I wish now to repeat one or two things I have said, and to add a few considerations of a general character.

I do not advocate this style of preaching as necessarily better than any other kind. I merely say it is calculated to accomplish a certain educative purpose in a unique degree. One great difference between a good preacher and a merely easy or popular one is that as you listen to him, week after week and year after year, you find your conceptions of life and of religion gradually changing, growing larger, saner, more inclusive and more satisfactory. To listen to him is like reading history or philosophy, while listening to the other is like reading one novel after another. In both cases you should have a good time. But in the one case you will also have learned something. The preacher is not simply a teacher, he is something more than that, but he ought to be that at the least and with the rest. And while he may teach many other things (I knew one man in Columbus who said, for instance, that all he knew about literature, and he knew a good deal, he had learned from Dr. Gladden's sermons), yet religion is his field. The literature and history of religion, and especially of his own religion, are things his people sadly need education upon. All I maintain for the kind of preaching I have been talking about is that it does this one thing. I do not know in what other way it can be so well done.

Neither do I advocate this kind of preaching to the exclusion of other kinds. Any one kind of preaching is monotonous. I advocate it only for preachers who have many things to say that do not come from the Bible at all, and who know when they have done one kind of thing about long enough.

A word may well be said also about timeliness in preaching. Certainly it is a great virtue. All talk, of whatever sort, ⁱⁿ in whatever place, should be in some sense timely. To preach as if one did not live now but in some other age, to appear impervious to the great social, political, philosophic and scientific currents of thought that sweep across our own time and remake the landscape before our very eyes, is fatal. No amount of conviction, earnestness, learning or pulpit power can make up for the fact that the preacher seems to belong to another generation than his hearers. Up to date, with an eye open for history in the making, and an ear to hear what the spirit is saying in the chaotic noises of our confused and noisy time, the preacher must be. People will not long listen to him otherwise. I should be sorry if anything I have said in this discussion were understood to contradict this.

But there is another point to remember. Whatever is timely is temporary. One reads the newspaper every day and realizes at the end of the week that he has read about many things which if he had only waited a day or two he need not have bothered to read about at all. The trouble with too much of the literature, especially the fiction, on which we spend so much time, is that it is timely and nothing more. Great literature is not so much timely as timeless, and therefore good for all times — like Homer, or Shakespeare or the

220 Bible itself. The same is true in religion and in the work of the preacher. That which is merely timely is soon gone and forgotten. We get excited about it for a day, and then we pass to something else. But there are religious truths and convictions upon which the souls of men and women have grown strong and good in all generations. I believe that many at least of these religious truths and convictions have come to their classic expression in the literature of the Old and New Testaments, and that they are, better than in any other way, brought back to the consciousness of the preacher and by him communicated to his people through the study of the Bible and the right kind of preaching of it. That which is merely up to date, or that concerning which its up-to-dateness is its most distinctive characteristic, is the soonest out of date. It is the characteristic of the Bible as of all the greatest literature that it speaks to the man within men, irrespective of the particular time or place in which the individual man lives.

212 All good preaching must be human. It must have about it something that touches people, reaches them, finds them where they are, and appeals to them because it is deeply, broadly and essentially human. The most remarkable thing about the Bible is this same human quality. It has been long obscured by artificial and doctrinaire theories of its origin and an excessive veneration for it as an authoritative book unlike any and all others. The breakdown of artificial doctrines about the Bible, and the growth at the same time of a vastly better knowledge of what sort of book it actually is, now afford the opportunity of again making the Bible what it originally was, a people's book. We must, I suppose, be reverent toward the Scriptures, as we must toward all works,

literary or otherwise, that have any word of God in them for us. But just as the church has sometimes been so venerated as a divine institution that she has forgotten to be human, so a literature may be so worshiped as to seem to preclude the necessity of its being either understood or appreciated. Among the incidental or secondary aims of the ministry I know none which the preacher may better entertain than that of making the Bible a more human book.

If any preacher is interested in the kind of preaching I have been speaking of I should like to speak a word of encouragement to him. For many preachers may say, "This is all very well, but where can a man find time to know his Bible well enough to make such a use of it?" The answer is easy. Every educated preacher should have received some start on an acquaintance with the Bible in the theological school. He should have got — though it is only fair to say that he does not always get — a start on it which will make it easy and interesting for him to go further on his own account. Moreover, nobody preaches about the whole Bible all at once, but only about some little part of it. The preacher need not be an expert in the higher criticism, to begin. He has some few books of the right sort, or can get them, and more than a few he does not need. A modern Bible dictionary not too voluminous, a good one-volume commentary on the entire Bible to cover the books of minor importance, a commentary on each of a half dozen of the greater books like Genesis, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah and Jeremiah in the Old Testament and on the Synoptic Gospels in the New, will almost suffice for the whole undertaking. For a beginning almost any one of these books will answer. One learns by doing. And what one learns by doing what I have been

talking about is not merely how to do this; he learns about the Bible in doing it. A course of such preaching as I have advocated, kept up for four or five years, still better for ten, will bring the preacher out of it almost an accomplished biblical critic. He may be unfamiliar with some of the technical terminology and distinctions of professional critics, but he will know the essence of what they know. A preaching which is thus good for the preacher himself can hardly fail to be good for the people.



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